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SPRING :—PLOUGHING.



THE
COUNTRY YEAR BOOK:

DESCRIPTIVE OF THE SEASONS;
RURAL SCENES AND RUSTIC AMUSEMENTS;
BIRDS, INSECTS, AND QUADRUPEDS.

BY THOMAS MILLER.

WITH ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS,

Engraved on Wood by HENRY VIZETELLY, and others.



LONDON:
HENRY G. BOHN, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

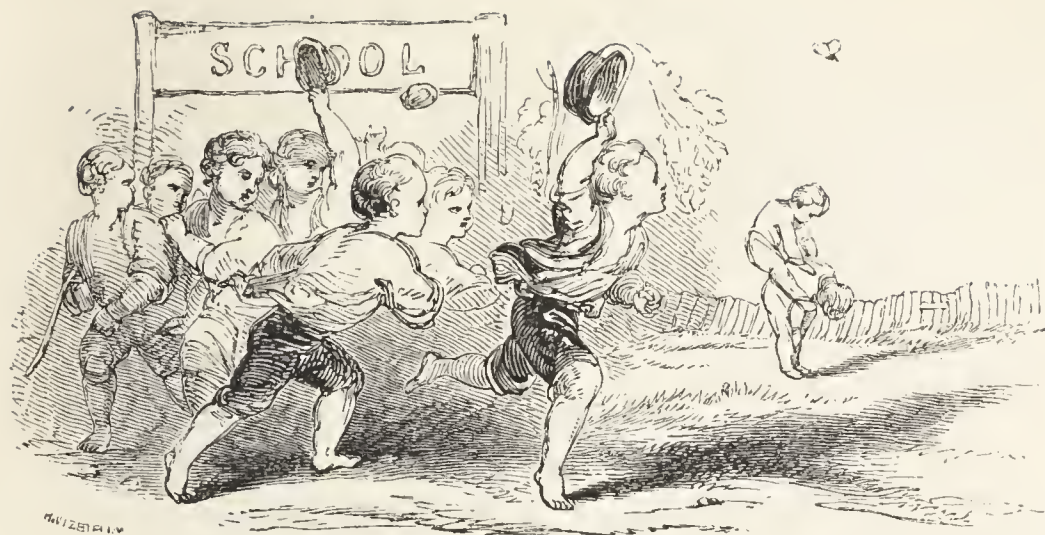


BEAUTY OF SPRING DESCRIBED—SONG OF THE SKYLARK—HAPPY LIFE OF THE BIRDS—PLOUGHING—COTTAGES AND COTTAGE GARDENS—THE VARIETY OF BEAUTIFUL SCENERY TO BE FOUND IN AN ENGLISH LANDSCAPE—WHY ENGLAND IS SUCH A GLORIOUS COUNTRY—GATHERING PALM AND EARLY SPRING FLOWERS—POETRY TO BE FOUND IN RURAL SCENERY—DESCRIPTION OF ROOKS; THEIR QUARRELS, AND WHAT THEY SAY TO ONE ANOTHER—AN OLD-FASHIONED ROOKERY—CARRION CROWS—VILLAGE STREET ON A SPRING EVENING—AMUSEMENTS OF POOR CHILDREN—SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR'S PLAYMATES—STIR THAT SPRING MAKES AMONGST BOYS—WHAT THE BIRDS SAY TO ONE ANOTHER; THEIR KINDNESS TO EACH OTHER—MY BOYISH HAUNTS—PLEASURES OF MEMORY—AN APOLOGY FOR REARING YOUNG BIRDS—BIRDS'-NESTING DESCRIBED; BEAUTY AND VARIETY OF THEIR NESTS: NEST OF THE THROSTLE; SAND MARTIN; SKYLARK; MISSEL-THRUSH; WOODPIGEON; GOLDFINCH; MAGPIE—HOW I BROUGHT UP YOUNG BIRDS—HIVE-BEES; NURSE-BEES; WAX-WORKERS AND QUEEN-BEES—ROUGH, HEALTHY, OUT-OF-DOOR GAMES—AN ADVENTURE THAT BEFEL THE AUTHOR—THE STOCK-DOVE; BEAUTY AND VARIETY OF SPRING FLOWERS—PROGRESS OF SPRING—SOME ACCOUNT OF A BUTTERFLY THAT WENT OUT FOR A DAY'S PLEASURE—BARK-PEELERS AND WOOD-CUTTERS; THEIR WOODLAND LIFE—DESCRIPTION OF SNAKES AND VIPERS, WITH A CAUTION TO AVOID THE LATTER—STORY OF LITTLE NELL; HER BROTHER; THE PONY AND THE CART; WITH THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF LITTLE NELL—THE CURLEW—HABITS OF THE NUTHATCH AND WOODPECKER—YOUNG LAMBS AT PLAY—BLOOMFIELD'S BEAUTIFUL DESCRIPTION OF YOUNG LAMBS—BULLFINCHES GREAT DESTROYERS OF BUDS; THEIR NEST DESCRIBED—THE RINGED-DOTTEREL

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A FEW WORDS TO MY YOUNG READERS,

WHETHER AT SCHOOL, AT HOME, OR ABROAD.

MOST RESPECTED SIRs:

LIKE a garrulous old gossip, I am about to tell you how I came to write this work—what doubts I set out with—what fears I had at the commencement—and what pleasure it afforded me when I at last sat down earnestly to my task. First, then, I felt fearful, having written so many books descriptive of the country, and country life, that I should find it difficult to produce any thing new and interesting on a similar subject. “But,” argued a grave and learned friend, who has ever the welfare of youth at heart, “you have not yet written any thing for Boys; and as you were once a country-boy yourself, you must have seen and heard of many things which would be alike interesting, amusing, and instructive to them, were you to tell all you know in a light, agreeable manner,—not in that silly, childish style, which is

called the simple school of writing, but, if aught, rather above than beneath their capacities ; for a clever lad will always manage to get at your meaning, when it is not buried beneath technical phrases : so do not fear being a little poetical and imaginative now and then—he will like your work all the better if a few such flowers are thrown around it judiciously. You can do it, if you will.”

Well, I thought at last I could ; so throwing aside all my doubts and fears, I at once began to tell you what I did, what I saw, and what I thought, when I was a country-boy : and so fresh, and vivid, and life-like, did many of the old familiar scenes rise again before me whilst I wrote, that I felt the warm sunshine playing about my heart, bright, and light, and beautiful, as it did twenty long summers ago ; and I was thankful that there was still so much of the old boyish feeling within me, which fitted me better to become your gay companion, than your grave tutor. And when I found how beautifully my respected Publishers were determined to illustrate and bring out “The Boy’s Own Library,” I not only resolved to amuse and please you, but also to blend useful knowledge and agreeable instruction with my country rambles, boyish games, and rural tales ; so I began “to brush up my larning,” and to hunt about for information respecting the habits of beasts, birds, insects, and flowers, and all sorts of country things which had interested me so much when a boy. I also read many valuable works, such as you would not yet understand in their original forms ; and these I adapted to your comprehension, and endeavoured to show you how the smallest flower that blows, and the tiniest insect that flies, are a part of one great and grand system, which is through-

out stamped by the CREATIVE POWER of GOD. That the more we study Nature, the greater our pleasure becomes; and that the paths which lead to such knowledge are the most delightful of all: and that the labour of gathering it in such pleasant places, as the green out-of-door world, is to lead a happier life than either a bee or a butterfly, who are always hovering about amongst the sweet flowers, though they cannot, like you, appreciate the wonderful works in which they find so much delight.

I have also shown you that the country can never become wearisome; that throughout the changes of every Season, you may always find something to instruct and delight you: and I believe that there never yet was a boy in whose heart a love of the beautiful country had been firmly implanted, who, when he became a man, could ever in after life stifle that inward yearning for those green, old, familiar places. For he who has once watched the birds build in Spring, and felt a pleasure in listening to their "wood-notes wild;" who has wandered for miles, ankle-deep, in the waving flowers of Summer; rambled through the woods when the solemn winds of Autumn strewed the entangled pathways with yellow leaves; or seen the untrodden snow lying broad and white upon the ground in Winter, as if the fields were paved with spotless marble, can never forget that

"God made the country, and man made the town."

To increase your love for the beautiful scenery of England—to make you fonder of its wild green woods, flower-covered hills, pastoral plains, pleasant walks, and sweet river-side scenery—I have written these books; conscious that you will feel much pleasure in reading

them, and in becoming better acquainted with many things, which are to be found in the country, that will be entirely new to you. I also have my pleasure in knowing that I have done something for the youth of Great Britain, that will make them more attached to their native land,—that little island like a

“Precious stone set in the silver sea,”—

whose renown the winds and waves have wafted to the uttermost ends of the earth.

And now, my much approved young Masters, with my kindest wishes I bid you, for the present,—Farewell.

Thomas Milnes





When daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then on every tree
Sings cuckoo, cuckoo.—SHAKSPEARE.

WHAT a pleasant sound
there is about the word
Spring, or Spring-time!

How sweetly it falls upon the ear, bringing also with it visions of primrose-covered banks, and primrose-coloured skies, just warm enough to tempt "those little angels of the trees," the birds, to come back again from over the sunny seas, build in their former haunts, and sing, in their old familiar hedge-rows and greenwood shades, all the sweeter through having been so long away from us! Oh! how dull would appear

those great, solemn, cathedral-looking forests without these little winged choristers to warble in them, and break the silence by the sound of their sweet notes—sweeter than the jingling of a thousand silver bells, all chiming with one accord ! What beauty now breaks upon us on every side ! what pleasant objects greet the eye ! what a lightness and buoyancy there is about our hearts ! the very soul seems as if it longed to escape, fly abroad, and mingle in the sunshine with the breeze, the birds, and the flowers ! Up springs the skylark from among the young daisies, where it has slept all night long, shaking the beaded dew-drops from its wings, as it soars singing into the clear and sunny blue of heaven, seeming to beat time to its own music by the motion of its pinions as it rises higher and higher, until it looks no larger than a bee, then diminishes into a mere speck, so small, that if the eye but loses sight of it for a moment, it vanishes amid the floating silver of the cloud, and its note sounds fainter and afar off, as if it were singing, at the same time, both to earth and heaven !—and we might almost fancy that there were angels' faces looking down and listening to its music, as they leant over the golden edges of the sun-dyed clouds, even as we look upward, and try in vain to catch another glance at the little chorister, who sings, as Shakspeare says, “at heaven's gate.” Further on, you hear a whole choir of linnets calling to, and answering each other, from every budding spray, and opening hedgerow ; and so much does their song harmonize with your own feelings, that you seem to hear them say to one another, “Oh, what a lovely Spring this is !” For all you fancy they can find to sing about, is their nests, the flowers, the budding may-blossoms, their young ones, the sunshine, morning, and the hushed twilight of evening, what buds they will feed upon, and what spots they will visit on the morrow. And what greater enjoyment can a boy wish for, than thus to ramble through the fields, and woods, and beside clear and pleasant rivers, at this delightful

season of the year, indulging in all kinds of wayward fancies, in watching the flowers and young buds as they blow and blossom, thicker and sweeter every day; or in endeavouring to distinguish the note of a particular bird, which has newly arrived from some far-off and foreign shore, and flown for many a mile over the ever-beating billows of the deep-voiced sea, to join the great band of winged musicians, who have come to play all the long summer in our green old English woods. There is something cheering and refreshing about even the smell of the earth as it is turned up by the ploughshare: it throws a countrified air all around, and it is pleasing to watch the heavy furrows as they move and fall over each other, then rest like the ridges upon the sea-shore, as wave after wave retreats, leaving only behind its footmark in long trails upon the sleeping sand. In passing the cottage gardens, too, you cannot resist stopping to peep over the railed fences, or through the half-naked hedges, for the golden crocuses attract the eye whether you look or not, and tell you that Spring has come again. Even the doors and windows of the cottages are thrown open, as if to invite you to peep inside, to see how clean and cheerful the sunshine, which has stepped in before you, has made them; for it is the gold which God scatters out of heaven upon the very poor to comfort them.

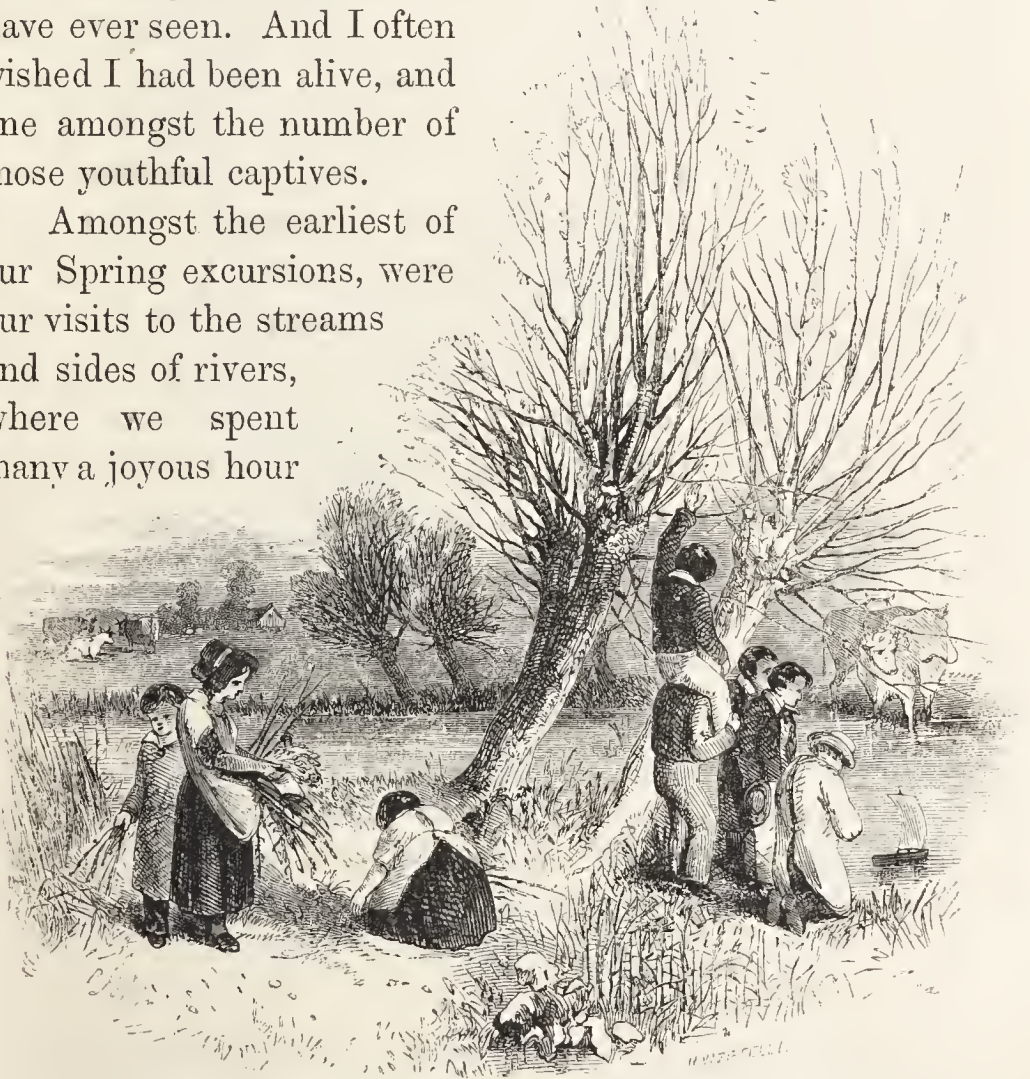
Oh my boys, what days of pleasure have we now before us! what delightful walks through healthy meadows, where we shall hear the golden-belted bee go humming over the blossoms, and see the gaudy butterfly resting like a folded pea-flower upon some newly opened bud! What concerts are already preparing for us in the woods, what sweet music now rings through the valleys, what green leaves are growing longer every day, to make an embowered shade for us to sit under, when we are weary through walking! What a drowsy murmuring there is about the rivers and streams, as if even the waters felt joyous in the warm sun-

shine, and could not refrain from telling the smooth pebbles, over which they passed, and the great golden marsh-marigolds, whose images they reflect back, how happy they have felt since Spring broke loose their icy fetters, and left them once more to wander "at their own sweet will!" For our England is a beautiful country, the climate so sweetly tempered, such gradual transitions from heat to cold, and cold to heat; such healthy breezes sweep over it from the wide and open seas by which it is every way surrounded; and its scenery is so delightful, and so varied with its rising hills and sunken valleys, and sloping uplands that seem neither hill nor vale; its lovely green woods and broad pasture-lands, through which rivers go winding like silver braids, running over a ground of rich velvet; and then over all these reigns such peace, that for miles and miles away, the country looks like one great garden—and while you gaze over such lovely scenery, you seem to ask yourself, that since the earth is so beautiful, what must heaven be? And this very England I would have you love more and more, however far away circumstances may remove you from it. I would never have you forget the country over which Alfred reigned; and for whose religion Latimer died; the land in which Shakspeare was born, and buried; where Milton sung; and Newton made such discoveries, as astonished the whole world. Such is the country to which you and I belong, the proud mother that nursed us, and that numbers amongst her children more noble names, than ever enriched the annals of any other kingdom in the whole wide world.

Nor ought we to feel less proud on account of our wave-beaten island having been first invaded by the Romans, when we remember that no less a genius than Julius Cæsar first taught our ancient forefathers civilization, and brought to our shores the very laws and government, by which classic Rome was herself ruled; and that, throughout all the changes of time, these have never been lost sight of by our legislators.

And, but for that invasion, those beautiful English boys, which attracted the eye of Gregory the Great, would never have stood in the slave-market of Rome ; nor would he, probably, ever have thought of sending missionaries to instruct our ancestors, in the Christian religion, but for them. What a thrill did it send through my heart, when I first read that passage in history, to know that nearly fifteen hundred years ago a few beautiful English boys were the cause of Christianity being first taught in this island ! That thought often made me feel more proud than the remembrance of all the great victories we have ever seen. And I often wished I had been alive, and one amongst the number of those youthful captives.

Amongst the earliest of our Spring excursions, were our visits to the streams and sides of rivers, where we spent many a joyous hour



SPRING.

as we called the budding willows and sallops, which were covered with golden and silver-coloured catkins; and these we carried home to place among the few flowers which we had found scattered upon the lap of Spring; for we never fancied the cottage looked as it ought to do, unless it was ornamented with a nosegay against Palm-Sunday; for it was an old and simple custom, endeared to us all the more through those beautiful passages in the New Testament, which describe Christ's entry into Jerusalem on that holy day. It seemed also a gathering together of the first offerings of Spring, for around the palm we planted the long green silken leaves and pearl-like flowers of the lily-of-the-valley; and these we surrounded with wild blue-bells, and spotted cowslips, and pale primroses, which we hemmed in by a narrow border of violets, sweeter than all earthly perfumes, and daisies rimmed like the little stars of heaven. And when we looked upon all these treasures so neatly placed in the rich china jug, or rude earthen vessel, they recalled the green and secluded places where we had gathered them,—the dim woods, “ankle-deep in lilies-of-the-valley;” the warm primroses, that peeped out like buried treasures, from their Winter hiding-places amongst the moss and dead leaves; the cowslips that nodded on many a sunny and breezy hillock; the violets that nestled about the stems of large old forest-trees, and seemed to creep under their own broad dark leaves for shelter, as if they feared their sweetness might betray the place of their concealment; blue-bells that grew in moist and hidden spots, where, saving their own presence, and the pale pearly cups of anemone, which ever waved their delicate and drooping heads before the gentlest breeze that blew—there was

“An eternal April on the ground
That made it all one emerald.”

For many a journey had we in Spring to gather cowslips; the fields 'all about Park-house were covered with them; and

often have we pulled up one of these beautiful roots, and counted more than twenty buds which sprung from the same stalk. What a huge handful have we sometimes culled within an hour or two! all smelling so sweet, and looking so lovely, with their deep golden cups spotted with ruby, bedded and resting together, and appearing a thousand times more beautiful than the richest ornament that was ever cut out of the purest gold. Then what a pleasant task it was when we got home, to pull the delicate peeps, or buds from out of their pale emerald sheaths, and to know that when we had gathered and picked a sufficient quantity, they were to be made into that most delicious of all home-brewed beverages, sweet and fragrant cowslip wine! Often, too, at some unexpected corner of a field, during these rambles, we came unaware upon a country maiden



MILKING THE COWS,

and singing as cheerfully over her labour, as the birds that were hopping about upon the boughs among the blossoms : and then we purchased of her many a draught of the warm new milk, which we drank through the creamy foam, that broke, like opening may-buds, about the transparent edge of the snow-white wooden dish ; for we knew that the cow which yielded it had herself fed upon the sweet yellow cowslips ; and the very flavour itself was rich as honey steeped in a bowlful of delicious flowers. And sometimes across the road, and up a lane that led nowhere but to green fields, to a country that seemed too beautiful ever to be broken up into roads, where it would have been almost a sin for a wheel ever to have crushed those endless and lengthening lines of white daisies, that seemed to stretch onward and onward for evermore, as if they were trying to find their way to the beds of primroses and violets in the distant wood ; as if they had for ages formed an old highway of flowers, over which had marched the feet of many thousand bees and butterflies : sometimes crossing over one of these beautiful pathways that lead to the little quiet heavens of this green and beautiful world, an innocent shepherd-boy would pass, driving before him his snow-white lambs, to bleat and feed upon some new and untrodden pasture ; or seated sideways upon one of his sleek and well-fed horses, a ploughboy, in his weather-stained smock-frock, would ride whistling along, the long whip dropping listlessly over his shoulder, and we heard the jingling music of the harness, until the sound died away in the distance : and then, saving the singing of the birds, the whole wide landscape would again lie buried in its green stillness ; a stillness, amid which even the murmuring of the far-off bee became audible. And ever there went singing along, with low and subdued voice, some clear brook that could only be heard when a rounded pebble checked its course, as if it murmured at being kept away from the flowers that grew beyond, and had come a long way down the hills to look at them, from where the breeze

had first blown the tidings about the beauty of the spot in which they grew; and ever over the stream the drooping maybuds waved, as if they tried to match their whiteness against the silvery cloud that was mirrored below; and here and there great trees threw their green arms across it, chequering its onward course with cooling shadows, as if to give it for a little time a pleasant resting-place, before it went on again to where the golden and unclouded sunshine fell. And where it went broadening out, the gaudy dragon-flies met together to play; and where it went narrowing in, the tufted bulrushes, and the feathery reeds, and the yellow flowers of the broad-leaved water-fags, nodded, and bended, and rustled together, as if they were never weary of telling each other, how pleasant was the spot in which they grew; and little birds took up the tidings, and told them to the blossoms, and the blossoms repeated them to the bees, who were ever murmuring about their fragrance; and the bees whispered the tidings back again into the bells of the flowers; and the flowers breathed them back again to the butterflies, as they sat swinging upon their honied bells with folded wings. Then the rounded dews of twilight came dropping down to see if they were true; and all night long the stars of heaven stopped out to look at them; and the bright moon hung with delight over such beautiful scenes, and the golden beams of the early morning came out of heaven to play there, as if they could find no place so bright and beautiful about the sky. And so do I still look upon the beauties of Nature—to me they are ever clothed in rich and fanciful colours, the flowers have a language which I seem to understand more clearly every time I look upon them; they have made my mind

“A mansion for all lovely forms;
 My memory a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies.”

I can conjure them up before me at any moment; I can see

them all as clearly mapped out in my "mind's eye," as when I last looked upon them; and such pleasing visions never allow me to feel sad or lonely for many moments together. It is as if my heart in its boyish delight had opened and taken in all these beautiful impressions; and night and day, through all the changes and troubles of life, they are still there, and I can gaze upon them at my will. They are treasures no living mortal can deprive me of.

If you have never seen a rookery, I would advise you, the first time you get into some old-fashioned neighbourhood, where one of these airy cities are built, to visit it without delay, for there you will find much to amuse you. The rooks are all thieves, every man-jack of them! and they think no more about walking off with a beam from another rook's house, and strengthening their own nest with it, than a big thief of a boy does of snatching up some poor little fellow's marbles, putting them into his pocket, and walking away with them. Then these rooks quarrel dreadfully; often getting from words to blows, and, I dare say, abusing each other heartily, in their way, before they begin to fight. I have sometimes amused myself by trying to find out what they were quarrelling about, and have often fancied, when I have seen a couple of poor rooks, returning home with a stick apiece in their mouths (reckoning, no doubt, in their own minds, how many more trips they would have to make before their nest was completed), what must have been their conversation, when, instead of finding the foundation of their nest as they had left it, every stick had been stolen during their absence by a couple of lazy vagabonds, who were too idle to go and fetch the materials with which to finish their building, so stayed at home to steal whatever they could lay their evil hands upon, while their more industrious and honest neighbours were busily employed in rummaging about amidst the fields. I have fancied how annoyed they must have felt when, return-

ing with their last two sticks, they have, perhaps, said to one another, just before they reached home, "Well, never mind! though it is hard work flying such a distance, and bringing back such pieces of heavy timber, yet we have already made above a hundred journeys, and as many more will complete our task; then we shall have such a nice nest of our own, and can go to bed when we like, and get up whenever we please, or at least lie awake; for those low-bred people, who live above our heads in the attics, are always up and quarrelling at the first peep of day, and there is no getting a wink of sleep after; and——but, bless me! how is this? we must have mistaken the bough; and yet that can't be, neither! That must be Black-cap, peeping out over his house-top there; and I know Splay-foot, who lives next door, by his claws; and the other nest belongs to the long-nosed fellow I had such a battle with last Spring—I know him by the scar above his eye, which I made with my sharp beak when we fought, and which he'll carry to his grave with him. Well—what a shame! I declare, if some of the thieves out of the next street have n't been here during our absence, and carried away every stick and stake that we had piled together, even to the very scaffolding! It's too bad; that it is! and I wo'n't stand it any longer; so, come along." And they spread out their black wings, and away they sail to the next tree, and alight on the bough next to that occupied by the robbers, whom they have no difficulty in detecting, for the very bulk into which their nest has so suddenly grown, plainly tells that they have not come by the materials honestly. "What do you mean, you scoundrel, by coming and carrying off the whole of my house, while I was away?" commences the bolder rook of the two. "Beg your pardon," answers the black rascal, whose very looks condemn him; "but I thought, as you were so long gone, you had perhaps left this place altogether, to reside in some more peaceable neighbourhood—

for this is but a sorry spot to live in; so, making sure that some other rook would be stepping in and taking possession, why, I took the liberty. Beg pardon; but hope there's no offence." "No offence!" exclaims the injured rook, "take that, you thievish-looking fellow," and he fetches him such a bat on the head with the point of his beak, as sends him spinning on the other side of the nest. "I will thank you not to strike my husband," cries out Mrs. Rook, who has hitherto remained in silence. "Your husband deserves it, and you too, madam," exclaims the injured lady, who has accompanied her husband; "for you are, both of you, dishonest persons." "I would thank you to keep your impertinence to yourself," replies the robber's wife; "for if you do not, you will put me under the painful necessity of compelling you." "You compel me! you dirty, black-looking hussy! You! When did you wash your face last? I'd box your ears for two straws—that I would, you saucy madam, you!" "At your peril dare to lift up your hand against me!" replies the other; for if you do, I'll call my relations, and give you in charge, that I will!" "This stick's mine," says the other, hopping down, and planting her claws upon it; "deny it, if you can. It's mine, and I'll have it!" "Not by my consent, madam!" answers the other, also planting her claws upon it. Then battle-royal commences; they pull, they peck, they strike, they thrust; they stop a moment to take breath, and at it they go again. Their husbands are also fighting: all the neighbourhood is up! from every nest there are a couple of heads poked out, looking on the combatants—some crying, "Serve 'em right! Well done! Give it 'em!" Some hovering about in the air, and exclaiming, "Bless me, what a disagreeable neighbourhood this is to live in! nothing but fighting and quarrelling, picking and stealing; really, Mr. So-and-so, I think it's high time you and I moved to a more respectable place; but I'm glad the honest people have

thrashed 'em, and recovered their own again; and, as the whole colony seem to be up, driving these low, thievish people away, I think it our duty to join them in showing our disapprobation, lest, by our standing aloof, we should be suspected of countenancing the delinquents." There is something pleasing about a



ROOKERY,

when the windy tall elm-trees on which they build overlook some ancient and picturesque hall, where you can catch glimpses, between the openings of the trees, of large bay-windows, and clusters of tall twisted chimneys; where the brown, winding carriage-path runs in and out between the embowered avenue, while behind lie sweeps of soft velvet greensward, which go down to

some smooth sheet of clear water, on which the stately swans are sailing about like little silver ships, so small and indistinct do their forms appear, when seen from the remote distance. In such a spot, with the grey old tower of the village-church heaving up behind the trees, a rookery seems in keeping with the scenery. The drowsy cawing which they make gives a soft and dreamy sound to the landscape, and there is something poetical in the very thought that their ancient household has been reared there, time out of mind,—perhaps ever since the first stone of the old building itself was laid,—and that generation after generation of their dusky race have been swept away, like the long line of heirs who have succeeded each other, have had their births, their marriages, and their funerals; have come in, and gone out from the doors of that ancient hall; even as the rooks themselves have done, between the openings of those tall old trees, which still stand green and high, and looking as unchanged as the building itself, as if the same inhabitants still moved, and dreamed, and lingered there, unaltered amid the brooding quietude, which has slumbered over so many centuries. They also pay visits to the old church, peep in among the inhabitants of the neighbouring village, move and forage and walk about every acre of the estate, as if to see that all was going on as it ought to do,—for no one ever disputed their claim to the proprietorship of the soil, and they look out over the wide estate, as if they were alone the sole owners. Nor will they allow any strangers to build or settle down upon their ancient property; for although they often quarrel among themselves, still, if any intruder dares to occupy a branch within their broad boundary, the whole colony are up in arms in a few moments, and away they rush with their dusky banners outspread, uttering their hoarse war-cry, and sailing on with sharp-pointed beaks, and wing to wing, like brave soldiers who are resolved to storm the enemy's citadel, and carry it at the point of the bayonet.

There is a great difference between the habits of rooks and

crows ; the latter are a wild restless race—wandering Arabs, who pitch their tents anywhere in the great desert of the world, enemies to all order, all rule, and all society ; they build their nest upon some solitary tree which commands a wide look out, and will sally forth at a moment's notice upon any peaceful passenger, be it a young hare, or a sickly lamb, a stray chicken, or a wandering pigeon, who are unfortunate enough to pass within eyesight of their evil neighbourhood. Nor will they hesitate to give battle to either a hawk, a kite, or a raven, should they venture to approach their nest ; and so highly are their fighting qualities estimated by the country-people, that when the cruel and murderous pastime of cock-fighting was more in vogue, it was a common practice to place hens' eggs in the nests of these crows, after having taken away those which the crows had laid, and leave them there to be hatched ; and from these eggs were the finest breed of fighting-cocks produced. This is a fact which I have often witnessed, and which I have never yet found mentioned in any work on natural history. Their eggs are rather large and long, and are of a beautiful green colour marked with dark and irregular spots. They are not easily distinguished from the rooks, saving that the bill is more bent, and that there are a few bristle-like feathers growing about the base of the beak. The rooks however, feed on insects ; while the crow gorges itself with any kind of animal food it can alight upon ; hence it is called the carrion-crow.

What a change has Spring produced both in the streets of the towns and villages ! You feel happy whilst gazing upon the number of poor children it has released from the cold and darkness of Winter, amid which they were pent up like so many prisoners. And you can tell by their merry shouts, and the eagerness with which they follow their childish amusements, that the warm cheerful sunshine has caused them to forget for a time all their poverty and suffering. Even the smallest of all, who have not been able to run for more than a few

weeks, have found pleasure in piling up tiny hillocks of dirt; while their little brothers and sisters are busily employed in arranging the buttercups and daisies, which they gathered in their pinafores, heads and tails together, with handfuls of weeds and grass in the green and pleasant meadows : sweet places ! Oh ! how different to the smoke, and dirt, and squalor, which are found in too many of their miserable homes. The warm Spring evening has, like a friendly voice, called them all forth ; and although there are traces of dirt on their young innocent faces, which show how they are neglected by their poor parents, still they bear not now about them those marks of care, which give to ragged and hunger-bitten children such an old, grave, and heart-aching look. What boy, during his walk on a fine Spring evening, has not observed these children of the poor, and watched them engaged in their out-of-door amusements, an hour or so before bed-time ? Has not seen two little bare-footed creatures, whose frocks kept slipping from off their shoulders every now and then, busy and happy at their game of battledore and shuttlecock ; one, perhaps, had got an old book-cover, the other the hard crown of an old hat, and these were their battledores ; while the shuttlecock, which they struck with so much delight, one after the other, was, perhaps, formed of a cork, in which they had stuck a few feathers that had fallen from the half-starved hens which pecked about that poor and wretched-looking neighbourhood. And yet those children were just as happy with such make-shift toys, as they would have been with the grandest that ever came out of a tempting toy-shop. They jump up just as high at each stroke, and laugh just as loud as you would do were you playing with the richest presents that you ever received on your birthday. And is it not a pity that those poor children, who are now so happy and so innocent, will, for want of that education which you are favoured with, and for that watchful care which your fond parents keep over you, be left to wander about wherever they choose ; untaught and uncared

for, will many of them run from street to street with Lucifer-matches to sell, or from door to door begging a mouthful of bread ; or mingle with other children, who through bad examples have fallen into evil ways ; who never had a fond mother to kneel down before while they said their prayers, ere they retired to sleep, or a kind father to take them in his arms and bless them when they awoke in the morning. Oh ! you would shudder if you could but trace the future career of many of those poor children whom you see on a warm Spring evening so playful and happy, in spite of all their dirt and rags, as they emerge from the courts and alleys where they have been shut up all the winter long. I know I am writing to warm-hearted English boys, possessed of noble feelings, and I am sure that when they pass these poor neglected children they will feel sorry for them ; and that if ever they possess the power in after-life, they will lend their aid in establishing schools, and endeavouring to alleviate the misery which hangs about those wretched courts and alleys, and such kind actions will bring their own reward. For who can tell how many children might grow up to respectable men and women through being able to read such books as are written for you ; but who, for want of education, wallow in the filth, and darkness, and ignorance amid which they were born : and where no one ever came to teach them right from wrong, or good from evil ? And when you are men, and in business, if some poor little fellow comes, with his hair peeping through the hole in his cap, his little cold toes showing like the heads of mice through the holes in his boots, his jacket shorn of half its buttons, and his corduroy breeches fastened up with string, do not, if he inquires whether you want an errand-boy, speak cross to him, because he is so meanly clad, or send him away because he has never before been in a situation ; for you know not how good, and willing, and honest, and industrious a boy may be found under that ragged covering. In the dark and dirty mines they dig for, and find, gold ;

amongst the dead leaves and withered weeds are the sweet violets often hidden; in the shells of ugly fish are found pearls; and if from the good old proverb you are taught that "every thing is not gold that glitters," so may you, on the other hand, be sure, that every thing is not dross that looks like it; and that many a good boy has been a lost man because he was unable to make a respectable appearance at his outset in life. I would not give a pin for a boy who has not courage enough to judge for himself, and to form his own opinion, even when it differs at times from that of others.

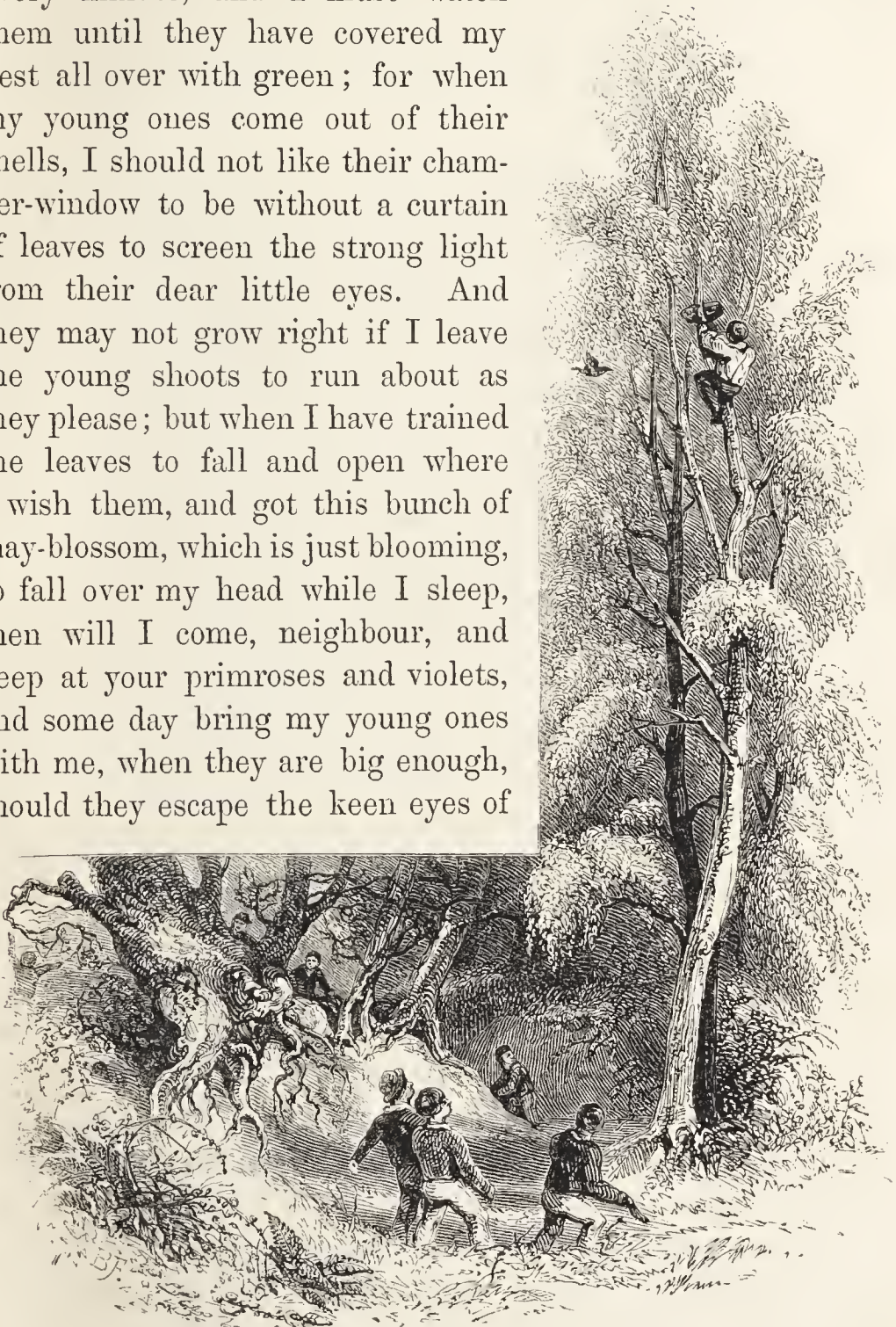
I remember, when a boy, wearing my father's cap and feather, and sash and sword, for he had been an officer in the volunteers; but whether I played the part of Napoleon or Wellington, or led on the French or English in our games, I never would countenance the rejection of a poor little playmate because he wore a ragged jacket; but rather would decorate his torn sleeve with white paper, and make a sergent of him: and no boy could muster so large an army as I could, through enlisting such lads as prouder boys were ashamed to play with. Their little hard dirty hands never hindered me from placing in them the white broken bits of pot which enlisted them for soldiers; no, not even if they wore the coarse grey livery of the workhouse; for workhouse children were allowed to come out and play in those days: and many a time have we exchanged our white bread for their brown; ay, and eaten it too. They knew where the choicest birds built, and the finest flowers grew; and who like them to climb the high hawthorn hedges, and bring down the sweetest boughs of may, branches on which the first sunbeams of morning broke, and on the topmost twigs of which the little birds got up to sing their morning hymns. Was I better than they were, because my father had once been a merchant, and owned ships, and called wharfs beside the river his own; and kept a banker's account, and had once carried his head high amongst the people,

who, because they are rich, the world considers them alone respectable? Not at all. His ships were wrecked, the bank broke, and I became one of the children of the poor; their companion, their playmate, the leader of their games; for they loved me, and I loved them. No rich boy could have been happier than poverty made me. I often thought of the once wealthy banker, who became a drivelling idiot, and went about with his hat turned upside down, with his stockings hanging about his heels; and who, when asked why he wore his hat so, would reply that "the world was turned upside down with him." Poor fellow! our little fortune was lost through his failure, and he became an idiot, and I one of the children of the poor. But for these changes I should never have been able to write for you as I do now—never, perhaps, have been nursed in the iron school of adversity.

How merrily do those little, ragged fellows trundle their hoops along! I wonder what they did with themselves during the long winter-nights! Perhaps, poor things, they were sent to bed soon after dark, to save fire and candle, as is frequently the case amongst the very poor. Here they are spinning their tops. How kind it was of that old gentleman to step off the pavement, rather than tread within the ring they have made! Depend upon it, from the smile which passed over his good-natured countenance, so pleasing a sight recalled his own boyish days. Here, again, they are busy at hop-scotch, or hop-bed, as it is called in some parts of England. How beautifully that little girl balances herself on one foot! with what judgment she strikes the smooth piece of broken pot with her shoe, as if she could feel the distance, as she struck it from the centre of one figured square to another: it passes even the narrowest of all, for none are difficult to her. What a colour such healthy exercise brings into her fair face; and how soundly she will sleep under the thatched roof of her little cottage, after her play

is over! Marbles are turned out of their hiding-places; drawers are hunted over for fishing-tackle; bows and arrows are once more called into use; the skeleton of the great kite is taken down, and covered with paper; and one thing after another is brought forth, to be again cast aside in its turn, for Spring has brought with it such long days, and so many pleasures, that, out of such a number, we scarcely know which amusement to follow first. There is the little garden to dig up, and the seeds to be sown, and there are wild flowers to gather in the fields, and birds'-nests to peep into in the hedges, and the osier-peelers to watch beside the river, and the bark-peelers, who are at work in the great woods; to look at, and see them strip from off the trees all their beautiful mossy bark, and leave their trunks white and naked upon the ground: and anglers are now busy among the streams, and the bees will be swarming, and the young rooks dropping out of their nests, and, above all, the old birds have begun to lay. And some of them sing so sweetly that you might almost fancy you could understand what they say! that one was calling to some near neighbour, and exclaiming, "Just come and look, and you'll see the sweet blue-violets, and the pale golden-primroses, peeping out from amid their green leaves, and sending up such a delicious perfume all about my nest, that I cannot sleep a wink after day-dawn. So sweet is the scent which breaks my slumber, I'm forced to get up, and sing for joy." "I cannot come now," answers another; "I am watching the white blossoms on the hawthorns break through the snowy pearls and green emeralds in which they have been so long wrapped up; and I love to count how many pink, and how many pale ones, blow together in the morning. And there is a little bed of blue-bells at my feet, which are growing more blue, and more beautiful, every day; and all under the bank above which I have built, the ground is golden with the sunshine of the celandine; and the

little buds keep breaking out of their green sheaths about every minute, and I must watch them until they have covered my nest all over with green; for when my young ones come out of their shells, I should not like their chamber-window to be without a curtain of leaves to screen the strong light from their dear little eyes. And they may not grow right if I leave the young shoots to run about as they please; but when I have trained the leaves to fall and open where I wish them, and got this bunch of may-blossom, which is just blooming, to fall over my head while I sleep, then will I come, neighbour, and peep at your primroses and violets, and some day bring my young ones with me, when they are big enough, should they escape the keen eyes of



BOYS BIRDS' -NESTING:

and while they chase each other in and out among the may-bloom and the woodbine, we will sit apart, and watching, teach them the same sweet tunes which we were taught to sing, and which are as old as the hills, and yet ever fresh as the flowers of Spring."

For assuredly the birds must think of something while they sing; and what can it be, unless it is about their nests and their young ones, and the flowers, and the cheerful sunshine, and the rounded dew-drops which fall all night long on the silken plumage of their wings? Some think that the birds sing only to express their love to each other, and to tell how happy they are together. Perhaps it may be so; for it has been remarked, that they often sing all the sweeter after they have had a quarrel and a fight, and perhaps that is their way of making it up again. For we know that, even amongst ourselves, little brothers and sisters will sometimes peck at each other; then kiss, and become friends the next minute. But to show you how kind birds are to one another, I must tell you, that whilst the female bird is sitting upon her eggs to hatch them, the male bird seldom stirs far away from her; but will perch upon a bough near at hand, and sing to her, seeming to say, "I know, my dear, you must stop at home and keep your eggs warm, or the young ones will all die; but never mind, it will not be for long, and when they are able to fly, and provide for themselves, we will have many a happy ramble again through the green woods; and until that time comes I will never leave you." Some think that the old birds teach the young ones to sing, the same as mothers teach their children to talk. But this can hardly be true, for their young ones are only just able to chirp whilst they are under the care of the older birds; nor is it until the following Spring that they begin to break out into song. We might as well conclude that they also taught their young ones how to build their nests, which we know is not the case. Trifling as these things may appear, they serve

to convince us that there is some great and secret power at work "who doeth all these things;" and that power can be nothing less than the wonder-working hand of God. Oh! what happy days did we spend during the primrose season of Spring! what rambles we had down Humble-car Lane, and Lea Marshes, and up Foxby-Lane, and over Double Hill, and by White's Wood, and Somerby Wood, and over Corringham Scrogs, and among the dark trees in Long Plantation, and up Thonock Lane, and among the hedges on Castle Hills: over the bridge, and in the fields about Beckingham, and Bole, and Sawnbly, and Wheatly; by the Delf Banks, among the water-flags and bulrushes; past Cape's ropery, with its high old hawthorn hedges, in Parnell's osier-holt, with its crumbling brick bridge, and weather-stained sluice-gates! Oh! I feel as if I could jump up out of my arm-chair now, and run off, without once stopping, to visit those dear old sweet familiar places, and hunt every hedge and bush once more for birds' nests, as I did a quarter of a century ago. I will no more believe that my heart whilst ever it beats, can either grow old, or cold, or cease to pant and yearn for those delightful spots, which are ever green with the pleasant memories of my boyish days, than that they will cease to be covered in Spring and Summer with milk-white daisies, and sun-dyed buttercups, or hemmed in with pleasant hedges, powdered over and perfumed with the blossoms of may. I will never believe but what the river sings and murmurs as sweetly through those evergreen and winding banks, as it did when I was a boy; and that the silver-sounding bells ring as cheerfully from that old grey and weather-beaten tower, as when I listened to them in my childish years, and sighed, because my companions could not feel so happy as I did. I can never think that the water-flags around that deep, silent pond, will ever be without a reed-sparrow's nest, or that the hedge-sparrows will ever cease to build, and lay their sky-dyed eggs, in the hawthorn hedges, which surround Gate Burton.

I cannot think that the throstles will ever forsake those dark firs in the old plantation; or the



BOTTLE-TIT'S NEST

be ever found so beautifully built, as amongst the thick under-wood, which grew over the wild blue-bells that waved there; or that the blue-winged jay will ever fly away to build any where but in Lea Wood; for although I have grown older, the fond remembrance that is yet rooted there, is still ever young, and dances its fresh, green leaves in the wind and sunshine, as if the bark on its stem was yet unwrinkled, and not a tuft of moss had clung to its storm-beaten trunk. I would gather all the birds that ever sang about me in my boyish days, if I could, and thought that they would become my companions, without either repining or complaining; for I should fancy when they sang to me, that they were telling me all about the old hills and woods we wandered over years ago, and for which our loves would still be mutual; and sometimes we should be very glad, and very sorrowful together, and close our eyes in the same twilight, and dream about the same old familiar scenes, for we should be all prisoners alike, longing for the same summer green, they and I, sending every beat of the heart after things that were far away. And yet, not so! for even with closed eyes I can look through the dim avenues of

old years, down the grey twilight of time can I gaze at my will, for nothing there is wholly dark; the sinking sunset is gilded over with pleasant memories, and even in sleep they steal forth, to visit those beloved haunts, to bring me back tidings about the flowers that are budding, and to comfort me when I awaken; and this is my reward for never having forsaken them. I never threw my dead flowers away to be trampled under foot by the rude passer-by, but laid them reverentially aside, covered them with dead leaves, and buried them in Autumn under some favourite bed, believing that they became a portion of those which appeared again in the following Spring. If I carried home a little bird, and brought it up tenderly, when I heard the rough winds piping over the grave of Summer, I knew it had no stormy sea to pass over, to escape from the biting cold of the coming Winter; and I consoled myself through knowing that I had saved its tiny wings from many a weary beat; and then I could carry my prisoners whenever I pleased into a large and pleasant garden, and hang up their cages in the thickest green of the trees, and that made them more happy than if they had only unmeaning dead walls to look upon. I knew that no sharp-toothed martens, such as skulk about the shadowy branches in the woods, could spring upon them unawares and devour them; that they would never want for food, however severe the winter might be; that I was kinder to them than the elements, which forced them to seek a change of climate over wide and perilous seas; and, if they seemed very restless when the sweet Spring came, and hanging them up amongst the beautiful apple-blossoms made them no happier,—if they would not come to me when they were called, and hop, and peck, and gambol in my presence, I invariably restored them to liberty.

Hawks and owls I dealt less tenderly with: I knew they were cruel by nature; that if once free they would commit murder by wholesale, that many a mouse would cease to

squeak, and many a bird to sing. Over these I reigned with an iron hand; and sometimes when I heard a sweet bird sing, I said to myself, "Perhaps the prisoner I have now in safe keeping would, had he been abroad, have put a stop to thy sweet piping;" for I had, during my rambles, seen many of these sharp-beaked, and strong-winged fellows, take a walk through the sky, and look round as if they were only admiring the prospect below, when pop, without leaving the little songster time enough to say "Oh deary me," they would drop down like a stone, and commence murder, with no more compunction than a fallen apple would feel for the poor caterpillar it had crushed to death.

And now, before I offer any further defence about capturing and caging birds, I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with their habits, conscious that no kind-hearted boy will ever voluntarily neglect or injure one, after he has read all I have got to say about them; but that if he ever does take, and confine them, it will be for the love of having such beautiful and wonderful companions about him, that he may become better acquainted with their habits, and watch their little ways: for I believe such objects tend to soften, instead of harden the heart; and shall, after having described their various methods of building, give my reasons for such belief.

To make you acquainted with those wonderful structures, birds' nests, I must first endeavour to point out the difference of style in which they build; showing you how some, like masons and miners, hew and cut their way into rocks; how others imitate carpenters, and saw, and measure, and fit; while a third follows the example of plasterers, and mixes together a strong cement, which it spreads smoothly over its little chamber; a fourth imitates the manufactory of hats and cloth, by felting and working together the materials into a solid body; others, again, are as clever as if they had served a long appren-

ticeship to weavers, so beautifully do they work together their habitations ; while some are excavators, and make holes in banks, or in the earth ; and many there are who, following the examples of the basket-makers, cross and weave the twigs together in an endless variety of strong and beautiful forms. All these builders on trees, on banks, on the faces of rocks, on the eaves of houses, upon and within the ground, I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with. Hurdis, in a beautiful little poem entitled "The Village Curate," written about half a century ago, in describing a bird's nest, has said,

" Mark it well, within, without,
No tool had he that wrought, no knife to cut,
No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert,
No glue to join ; his little beak was all,
And yet how neatly finished ! What nice hand,
With every implement and means of art,
And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,
Could make me such another ?"

Amongst the mason-birds we must place the window-swallows, about which you will find a long account towards the end of the book of Autumn, where I have entered fully into the way in which they form their cemented nests, their habits, and the manner in which they assemble together before their migration. Of these Shakspeare has said that there is

———— " No jetty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle."

And to this class of builders belongs the thrush, whose sweet music is scarcely excelled by any singer in that large and beautiful band which every day give free concerts to their assembled audience of leaves and flowers, in the green old summer woods : for the throstle forms her nest among trees and shrubs, first building the round outward structure of moss, straw, or hay, then lining the inside with a coating of rotten wood, which it

again covers over with a smooth lining of soft manure, that, when hardened, is almost as clear, and level, and round as the inside of a teacup ; all this it accomplishes with only its little feet, breast, and bill, and thus is formed the



NEST OF THE THRUSH.

I shall select from the number of mining birds, who like the rabbit burrow and make holes in the banks, a species of swallow, different from that which builds on the eaves of houses, and which is known to naturalists by the name of the bank-swallow, or sand-martin. The bill of this bird is short, strong, and sharp as the points of a compass ; and, by planting its sharp claws firmly on the face of a sand-bank, it will peg away with its little head and bill, which it brings down every time like the fall of a pointed pickaxe, loosening the sand at every stroke, that comes rolling down into the ditch or road below, as fast as it is loosened or pecked away. In order to form the whole of its nest round, its claws are planted in the centre, as you would fix one of the points of a pair of compasses ; and thus it stands, working its head round and round, its feet acting like a pivot, on which it turns, and so forms a perfect circle ; and works on, until it has formed a hole of from two to three feet deep, by

scratching out the sand which its bill has loosened, with its claws. It then places at the bottom of the hole a little dry grass and a few small feathers; and in this cavern, which its little beak and feet have hewn out, it there deposits its eggs. Frequently, however, when it finds the face of the quarry or sand-bank too hard, after having commenced its hole, it will fly off in search of some spot where the embankment is of a softer nature, leaving the old hole unfinished, and commencing a new one. They are naturally social birds, and hundreds of them will build their nests together within the space of a few yards, thus forming a colony under ground, as the rooks do in the trees above the earth: numbers of them build about the neighbourhood of Greenwich and Blackheath. The grebe, which is also another ground-builder, I have given a lengthy description of in my book of Summer. The stormy petrel, a bird which the sailors meet with miles out at sea, in the roughest weather, also builds its nest in a similar manner. Jackdaws, too, occasionally build in the holes in rocks; and the beautiful kingfisher, also, makes its nest in some hollow of the bank beside a stream. The skylark evinces great wisdom in building her nest upon the ground, so that the wet shall either be drained off, or by forming the coarse and loose foundation to absorb the moisture without penetrating to the warm inner ground on which its eggs are deposited.

Amongst the basket-making birds are the jay, the bullfinch, the red-winged starling, the raven, the crow, and the rook; together with several of our smaller singing-birds; such as the whitethroat and yellowhammer. Nor do they select such materials as the willows or salallows which are woven into baskets; but often with only dead, broken sticks, or twigs, they contrive to weave together a strong skeleton of basket-work, which it is almost impossible to take to pieces without breaking the materials of which it is formed.

But, perhaps, the neatest of all our basket-making birds is

the missel-thrush. It weaves together the stems of plants, grass, and moss, somewhat carelessly at first on the outside, though nothing can exceed the neatness with which it twines and smooths together the rough ends in the interior of its nest; carrying neatly round the longer stalks of dried grass, and even interweaving the slender twigs of the tree on which it builds, without breaking them off. The



WOODPIGEON,

which also belongs to this order of builders, erects so slight and open a nest, that I have frequently, while standing beneath the tree, seen the two white eggs shine through the skeleton floor of basket-work. I have also occasionally seen the eggs lying down broken at the foot of a tree after a high wind; for so flat and shallow was the nest built, that when the branches rocked to and fro in the breeze, the eggs rolled off as they would do from a plate when it was tilted aside; this you will not

wonder at when you come to examine the engraving of the



NEST OF THE WOODPIGEON.

I also well remember, when a boy, picking up two unfledged young ones, which had fallen out of their nest, one windy afternoon in Spring. One was killed by the fall, and as the other was too young and naked to carry home, I placed it carefully in my cap, climbed the tree, and deposited it again in its cold open nest. A few days after, I paid the tree a second visit ; and on climbing up, found that the other nestling was also dead. Whether the weight of my hand had disturbed the form of the nest, and caused the old birds to forsake it, and thus leave their little one to perish, or whether it received such injuries through its fall as prevented its recovering, I could not tell ; although I have known several instances of birds forsaking their nests through the hand only having been inserted while searching for eggs, even before the bird had commenced laying ; and this I believe is particularly the case with the wren and the neat-building pink, who, if she only finds a flake of moss standing different to what it did when she quitted the nest, invariably forsakes it. Indeed, all the felt-making birds, to which class this belongs, and which are the prettiest of all builders, as you will see by the following engraving of the



NEST OF THE GOLDFINCH,

can, from the peculiar neatness of their nests, easily detect the slightest disarrangement. They are called felt-makers through the texture of their nests resembling that of a hat, or a piece of woollen cloth; for so are the materials interwoven together, each minute thread or hair being worked or bedded in, even as a hatter would commence forming the woollen body of his work. Wool, moss, lichen, tufts of cotton, and the barked scales of trees, and spider-webs, are all massed and matted together in beautiful uniformity by these wonderful birds; and so particular is the goldfinch in putting a high and smooth finish to her work, that she will scarcely leave one single fibre of moss projecting beyond another, so neatly and smoothly is the material fitted together. All boys know, who have examined fur, wool, or hair, through a microscope, that they present a very different appearance to what they do to the naked eye; being full of fibres and rugged projections, all admirably adapted for bedding together, when they are once pressed down and rolled in. Hence the firm adherence and beautiful appearance which the felt-making birds are enabled to give to the smooth and finished linings of their nests.

MAGPIE'S NEST.

Another class of birds are called dome-builders, because they erect a roof over their nests; and the most commonly known to country-boys, amongst these, is the nest of the beautiful little jenny wren; this bird will sometimes carry a piece of moss in its beak nearly as bulky as itself. Amidst the larger birds which are dome-builders, may be classed the magpie; and every boy who has been a birds'-nester is aware of the difficulty of getting at the magpie's eggs, on account of the small aperture, and the sharp prickly roof which the bird has thrown over its nest; and I well remember seeing a



MAGPIE'S NEST

in a crab-thorn hedge, which ran beside my uncle's orchard at Thonock, so large, through the immense roof which was piled above it, that altogether it would almost have filled a good-sized sack. But the magpies who had brought up, and had driven out, several successive families of young ones in the same nest, seemed to know that they were allowed a long lease of the premises, so had added to their old nest, and built and repaired it year after year, until it was almost impossible to approach the inner chamber of their building.

And now I am sure I have said enough to prevent any boy

from ever wantonly taking a bird's nest, merely for the love of destroying it. I will not say that he ought never to take one at all, because I think it would do him more good than harm to become acquainted with their curious structures; and if he brings away an egg now and then, but leaves one or two behind, the bird will never miss it; though if he takes them all, she will forsake her nest. As to young birds, I have taken and reared many in my time; and now I will enter into my reasons more fully for so doing.

I know that there is no end of well-meaning people who raise a cry against birds'-nesting as a great evil, and a great sin, and one which is ever accompanied by excessive cruelty. Against all this outcry I have many good reasons to oppose. A kind-hearted boy would as soon think of killing one of his little brothers or sisters, as an innocent bird;—nay, he would shed tears even for the death of the latter; and if he was instrumental in killing it at all, it would be through excess of kindness. All children love rabbits and birds, and kittens, and little dogs. No fond mother can use her babe more tenderly than they do all these little things; and I firmly believe, that those who have been most indulged in keeping such little pets about them in their younger days, can never, as they grow older, become hard-hearted. I kept and reared young birds when I was a boy, got up at daybreak to gather them worms, fed them with a little at a time, many times within the hour, and placed them by my bedside at night, so that I might, with the first peep of dawn, or even before, if I heard them chirp, get up and feed them. True, I never took them from their nests until they were almost able to fly, and could nearly peck, and provide for themselves: then I had also the experience of older people, who had reared young birds for years, and I obeyed the instructions they gave me, and no boy lost fewer birds than I did in a season: and as to young blackbirds and thrushes, I verily believe that I kept

them better than ever their parents could have done; for I loved them: and oh, how proud I was when they could peck, and would take the food out of my mouth, as many have done! Remember, I never took the half-naked little unfledged things, not even when they were "double-penned," as we used to call it; and through this forbearance I allowed many a nest of young ones to escape: nor would I meddle with the smallest birds. They were generally great gaping throistles, and blackbirds, which I took: red-throated fellows who could devour almost any thing; and I seldom lost one, for I used to turn out in the cold grey dawn of morning, and get them such a can full of nice fresh worms and grubs from under the dried manure in the fields, that they lived like princes. And where could their mothers get such melts, and bits of red raw beef, and choice white bread to feed them with, as I did? Then I had such cages! so large, that they were as much as I could lift up, to hang them on the nails out of doors in the morning sunshine; and those cages I cleaned out every morning, sanded them, and put in fresh water, and covered the tops all over like beautiful arbours, with such green plants as the birds loved to peck, so that the people who passed by used to envy my birds; and I have often seen the wild birds settle down upon the cages. Mind, I never took young birds till they could almost peck. Some say, their parents moan and pine after them. So they might do for a week or so; but after that time the old ones would not care at all about them: for when they have once left their nest, they never return to it again, and I don't believe the old ones ever care a straw for them a month after they can provide for themselves. While they are very young, their kindness and attention is unlimited: but I have seen old magpies fight and peck at their young dreadfully, if they offered to come near the old nest after they were once turned out to provide for themselves. I never tried to rear very little birds, saving once a nest of grey linnets; and

I kept one of the brood about seven years, and all the rest lived for a long time. The hens, of course, we turned loose after the first year, when we found they did not sing. I do not believe that it is either wicked or sinful to keep and rear young birds, if a boy does it for the love he bears them. The cruelty consists in making them prisoners, and then neglecting them; but only a bad-hearted and unfeeling boy would act so. A kind lad would care more for his birds than his play. And oh, what pleasure it used to give me to see them come hopping off their perches, and hold their heads, first on one side and then on the other, when I called to them; and to see the delight they showed when they heard my voice, and the flutter they made to get nearer me! and I believe now that they were as fond of me as I was of them,—that they knew I kept them only for love, and felt that I behaved as well to them as their fathers or mothers would have done at that age: for to me they were ever young. I never went out for a walk without bringing home something nice for them. I never let a morning pass, no not even the sabbath, without attending to them. While Spring or Summer produced any thing green and beautiful, I decorated their cages with it. In Winter I kept them warm and comfortable; and while many a bird perished with cold and hunger in the fields, mine were fat, and warm, and well housed, and well fed. If one chanced to die, I made it a coffin, dug it a little grave, engraved its name on a piece of slate, and placed a monument over it,—nay, sometimes honoured its memory with the best verses I could write,—missed it, and felt unhappy for days after; and I am sure its parents could have done no more, if they would have done so much. Surely this was neither cruelty nor unkindness; and if it was a sin, I am sure I shall be forgiven for it; for if one or so did die rather young, and a jury of old birds could have sat upon its body, and I had been allowed to make my own defence, they would have returned a verdict and said, “This little bird

died through excess of love, and through having been brought up too kindly ; and although we do not agree altogether with the diet it received, yet many a humane nurse has erred through the same kind feeling, and sent many a pretty babe to kingdom come, through over-dosing it with Godfrey's Cordial." In a word, I have still the same boyish feelings now ; and I can no more help hunting for birds' nests when I go out into the country for a ramble, than I could twenty-five years ago ; and I have several boys and girls who in this take after me ; and not long ago one dear boy lay sobbing and crying all night long, because one of his rabbits had died—through excessive fatness. But I never allow them to take very young birds ; and our prisoners have generally consisted of such as we have purchased from men and boys in the streets. If I have taken a few eggs, and a few nests occasionally, it was never through motives of cruelty : "not that I loved them less, but nature more ;" and, as good old Izaak Walton says about fishing, "I always handled them as if I loved them, tenderly." Although I would not kill a little white innocent lamb for the wealth of the world, unless I were famishing with hunger, and nothing else could be had, still I would keep a bird, and treat it as tenderly as I would a dear little child ; believing that if it is a vice, it is a very innocent one, and that a boy will have to journey a long way through life to find a less. All young girls have fond and tender hearts, and I would have you ask your little sisters if it is wrong to love, and feed, and rear, and keep, beautiful little birds ; if they say it is cruel, and unkind, and sinful to do so, never on any account keep them : for depend upon it they are right, and I am wrong. If they earnestly dissuade you from keeping them, do so.

But I must tell you something about the habits of hive-bees ; for Shakspeare has beautifully called them the "singing masons," that "build roofs of gold,"—has compared them to

“soldiers that sally out, and rob the velvet buds of summer of their sweets,” which, he tells us, they “bring home with merry march;” and poets, in almost every age, have enriched the beauty of their descriptions, by images drawn from the habits and customs of bees. Often, before they swarm, an unusual silence has been observed in the hive, which, naturalists have supposed, is caused through their feeding, and making a hearty meal, and resting themselves before they set out on their journey. And, as a proof of this, the crops of those which swarmed were found filled with honey, while such as remained behind were comparatively empty. Also, previous to swarming, a number of male-bees may be discovered on the outside of the hive, as if waiting until the sun shone out that they might take their departure. When the queen-bee first breaks out from her cell, she endeavours to get at the cells in which the rest of the queen-bees are enclosed, that she may destroy them; for, by some unaccountable instinct, she cannot bear to have a rival queen near her. She is prevented, however, from destroying them by the male-bees, who are on the watch, and who, whenever she approaches the cells in which her rival queens are enclosed, pull, and drag, and bite at her, until they drive her away: and a pretty rage she gets into I can tell you; for she runs about from one bee to another, as if she said, “Am I to be mistress here or am I not? because, if I’m not, I’m off; and that’s the long and the short of it. I’m not a-going to be annoyed by those lazy hussies who are in bed, I can tell you, and who, when they get up, will be turning my house topsy-turvy. A pretty hive, indeed, we should have of it, with three or four mistresses, all ordering about! But really, I’ve worked myself into such a passion, and am so hot, that I must go out and have a mouthful or two of fresh air.” And out she goes, accompanied by a whole regiment of bees; and this is the first swarm. A few days after her departure, up stairs march two or three more heavy bees; and,

knocking at the chamber-door of another of the queens, who still remains behind, they exclaim, "Come, madam, get up: there's too many of us here—you must be packing. We've so many lodgers in the house that we're forced to sleep two or three in a bed; and that'll never do, you know, this hot weather; for the close breathing of so many of us causes the wax to melt and run down the bed-curtains: so get up and get your breakfast, and be off with you; for there's a whole lot of idle fellows who have done nothing but eat and sleep for this last day or two, and the sooner we are rid of them and you the better." And up she does get; and you may fancy in what sort of a temper after so much abuse as this; and after trying, but in vain, to get at the rest of her sisters, who are still in bed, to kill them, she is also driven out, as the queen was before her; and this completes the second swarm. Sometimes, during the summer, three or four swarms will, in this way, leave the hive, each party headed by their queen-bee, until the numbers are so much thinned within, that they are no longer enabled to prevent the remaining queen-bees from quitting their cells; and then it is that battle-royal commences. Nor is there ever a moment's peace in the house while two queens remain alive under the same roof; but when all the rest are killed, the surviving queen sits quietly down upon her throne, and, for another season, reigns peacefully over her loving subjects.

The working bees are divided into two classes,—namely, into nurse-bees and the wax-workers. The nurse-bees feed and take care of the young grubs, also putting a finishing touch to the combs and cells which the workers have commenced; confining themselves, also, more within doors, and seeming to throw all the care and trouble of bringing in provisions to the hive, upon the wax-workers, as if they had quite enough to do in looking after the baby-bees. When bees begin to build their hive, they divide themselves into various companies,—one brings in materials for the labourer, another

band places them in a proper form, and a third company supplies the labourers with food; for they are not allowed to leave off work and go to their dinner. When a labouring bee is hungry, he bends his trunk down, which is quite as well understood as if he rang the bell, and called "Waiter," the attending bee comes up, opens his honey-bag, gives the labourer a few drops, then hastens off to another; and so on, until the whole are supplied. But, were I to tell you half the wonderful things I have heard of and read of about bees, the subject would occupy many pages of my book: I shall therefore recommend you to read "Rennie's Insect Architecture," where you will find all about bees, and many other insects, clearly and simply described. I must not, however, omit to tell you, that when the bees quit their hives, and begin to swarm, the old women in the country rush out with their frying-pans and warming-pans, and commence beating upon them, and kicking up such a ran-tan-tan, that the sound is almost loud enough to break the drum of a deaf man's ear; but whether it causes the bees to settle down any sooner, or not, is a subject which I cannot undertake to decide. When, however, the bees have once settled down in a heap, like a great bunch of raisins stuck together, there is no difficulty in whisking them off, all of a lump, into an empty hive, covering them over with a cloth, and carrying them safely home; when, in a few days after, you will see them issuing out of their hive and buzzing about among the flowers, and returning home again laden with honey, just as if nothing had happened. I have described the grand state in which the queen-bee rides forth, surrounded with her troop of attendants, in the "Book of Summer."

Many a healthy out-of-door game had we in Spring, when we used to set each other "craggens," as we called it, although I never heard the word used anywhere but in the north of England; and a crag, you know, is rough and difficult to get over: hence, I suppose, the origin of the word, from our tasks being

rough and difficult, and often hard to accomplish. Many a time have I led the way in



LEAPING OVER A FENCE:

and it was not the lot of every little playfellow who had the courage to follow me, to escape as I did; for some of them would, perhaps, graze their legs, or come tumbling across, head over heels, or catch the top of the fence with the soles of their shoes, when, if the rail was tender or rotten, down it came before them; and oh, what bruises and falls they sometimes got! and although the pain often forced the tears into their eyes, still they had courage enough to laugh, rub their ankles, and set off again at full speed. So we went over hedge and ditch, bush and fence; nor was a good-sized gate any bar to us, for, by placing our hands on the topmost rail, long practice had

enabled us to throw ourselves clean over it, and across the fields we scampered; our speed increased all the more, perhaps, through hearing some farmer hollaing to us from the neighbouring farmhouse. And, oh! you have no idea how the barking of a great dog helped us across wide dikes, which, at any other time, we should have shrunk back from; for it made us prefer the risk of a ducking, to a bite in the heel; and more than once have I known the old farmer, who pursued us with a long whip in his hand, pluck up courage enough to leap; and, not being so light-footed as we were, splash he would sometimes come into the middle of the dike, while we ran away, laughing, and left him to get out as he best could. Nor would we, if once a fair distance from him, and a good stick or hedge-stake chanced to lay near at hand, hesitate to turn round upon the dog, who, when he found that we presented a bold front, would turn tail, and hurry off back again as fast as he came; for a dog seems to know a coward by instinct, and, unless urged on by his master's voice, will generally decline the contest when he finds that resistance is offered. Not that we were ever taken up for trespass, if even we were caught; for I believe many of the old farmers liked the run as well as we did; for, after all, we but trampled down a little grass, or broke a rail now and then, which was soon repaired where timber was so plentiful: besides, we enjoyed our amusement all the more when there was a little risk to be run; for we really did no serious injury, and such escapes only added to that courage which it is necessary every brave-hearted boy should possess, who has to battle his way through the difficult ins and outs of this busy world. A whimpering, fearful boy could never remain long our companion, without catching some spark of that fearless disposition which we prided ourselves in possessing. A dishonourable action we would never for a moment countenance;

nor would we ever desert a brave companion because he had fallen into some innocent scrape: and if, during these harmless trespasses, they captured one, they captured all—for we never ran our heads into the slightest danger without first binding ourselves to be true to one another. It is true we sometimes got into a scrape, and perhaps all remained prisoners together, for half an hour or so, in some barn or outhouse; and then, perhaps, the old farmer's wife would intercede, would bid her husband remember, that "boys would still be boys;" that it was as natural to them to run over fields and hedges as birds to fly, and that he was just as bad when he was a boy: and then we were liberated, under condition that we were not to jump over or break down the fences again; which promise we generally kept until the following Spring. Not that I would wish boys wilfully to trespass or take the liberties that we did, unless, like us, they were well known to the parties, who were more ready to look over than punish our little delinquencies. "Could n't we confine ourselves to the footpaths?" the farmer would argue. We promised that we would try; but, bless you! it was of no use; our feet fairly itched again to be beating about the long grass and the trailing flowers. Besides, how could we get to the hedgerows to look for birds'-nests, without first trespassing by crossing the fields? And then, again, we argued, "What harm could we do?" for, by such time as the grass was long and ready for mowing, most of the young birds had flown; so that, when we really should have been doing an injury, the occasion which tempted us to trespass had passed away. Such were our boyish arguments; for what clever lad cannot find a reason for what he does, and level down some little rough point which stands between him and his boyish pleasures? And I am sure my young readers will not like me a jot the less, if I make a clean breast of it at once, and tell them that such actions as these never either lay

heavily upon my conscience, or broke my sleep; and if I look upon them now with a feeling of regret, it is only because they have passed away, and that many of my brave companions, whose laugh was the loudest while they joined in these bygone and harmless sports, are now numbered with the dead. And I doubt not, but that the daring spirit which those robust exercises tended to foster, have, in an after day, caused many a bright eye to look calmly out upon the angry ocean, when its heaving waves rose high, and to stand, with unblanched cheek, in the stormy front of battle; for the heart that never quailed in the boy, would be the last to sink when danger fronted the future man. Nor less amusing was our game of



THREAD-MY-NEEDLE;

or, as it is called in the country, “ Duck-under-the-Water-kit ; ” and often at the Christmas and Easter holidays, our fair cousins and sisters were permitted to join us in this healthy exercise, for which we required a good range of ground. The way in which we played at this old-fashioned game was this,—two of us held up a handkerchief at arms’-length, one taking hold of each end, and keeping it nearly tight ; under this the next couple passed, and, halting two or three yards from us, they also held up their handkerchief, as we did ours ; a third, a fourth, and a fifth couple went under in the same way,—sometimes as many as fifty of us ; and a pretty sight it was to see that long arcade of handkerchiefs, of all colours, arching across a country road, and held by as merry a group as ever sent their deep laughter through the green lanes. When all had passed through, it was then their turn, who had stood up first in the game ; and away they went, at full speed, beneath that varied avenue of silks, cottons, and lawns, and soon came out at the far end, where they once more took their station, and formed an arch for the others to pass through. Few, unless they had seen us, would believe how soon we managed to run over a mile of ground : as to cold, we were too agreeably occupied to think about that, and too much in motion to feel it.

But I cannot part with my boyish companions without making you acquainted with an adventure which befel myself, conscious that every right-minded boy would have acted as I did, had he been placed in a similar position. And thus it happened, on a Christmas-time, many long years ago, that I had gone out to spend the evening with a party of young friends, to which other of my schoolfellows and playmates were also invited, and where, by the permission of their parents, we were allowed to stay rather late. All boys who are at all acquainted with old books, or old country customs, must have heard of the mummings and maskings which take place at Christmas ; how the shades of Robin Hood, and Maid Marian, and Friar

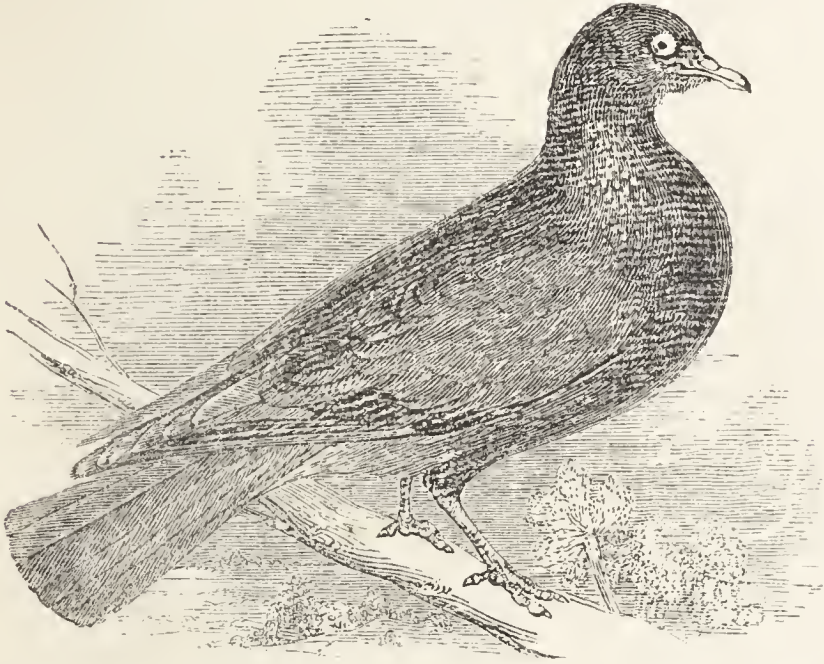
Tuck, and Little John, are again revived ; and how many an old wardrobe is ransacked of its antique finery for such occasions. One of my boyish companions who, alas ! is now dead, had joined a party of merry maskers at another house, and, as he had to represent the character of Robin Hood, I lent him my father's sword to give a finish to his warlike appearance. It was agreed upon between us, that he should leave his party at as early an hour as he could, and come to ours, and there return the sword which I had lent him, instead of taking it to my home. All of which was done as we had decided. We broke up at a late hour, for Christmas comes but once a year, and, although it was not past midnight, it was late for us. It was a fine moonlight night, and as the snow lay white, and bright, and beautiful upon the ground, some of the boys who were before me could not resist snow-balling one another ; and as one was attempting to give the other a roll in the snow, they chanced, amid their good-tempered struggle, to tumble together with a loud bang, against the front door of a house, in which another party were also spending their merry Christmas. By such time as the door was opened, they were off round the corner, and out of sight ; and there was I alone, unconscious of what had happened, with my hands in my pockets, and the naked sword thrust under my arm ; for during the many games we had had in playing at soldiers, the leathern scabbard had long before been worn out. Out rushed two or three gentlemen, and without making any inquiry, all began at once to accuse me of knocking at the door. I, of course, denied it ; when one young gentleman, not much older than myself, using very harsh language, seized hold of me ; and, in the excitement, I struck his arm with the pummel of the sword. Three or four men's hands were upon me in an instant, and inside I was dragged, and the door closed, even before my companions had missed me. "Would I beg pardon ?" "No ! I had done no wrong." I refused. "If I did not strike the door, would I

tell who did?" "No." "Was I not sorry that I had struck the young gentleman who had seized on me?" "No; he had called me a liar, and were my arms at liberty, and he were to repeat the accusation, I would strike him again." "I would do nothing, then?" "No; I had nothing to beg pardon for; neither would I betray, or give up the names of my companions. I had done no wrong, and they might do their worst." For, although not more than thirteen years of age, I had a proud and stout heart in a good cause. The constable lived but a few doors off, and he was sent for. Poor old fellow! I think I see him now, in his rough shaggy coat, with a spotted cotton handkerchief tied about his ears, the staff of office with the awful crown upon it in his hand, gaping as if not well awake, and wondering whether it was for robbery or murder that he was dragged out of his warm bed at that untimely hour. There stood I, the daring culprit, wanting some inches to make me five feet high. The charge was repeated. "I had said my say; I had no defence to offer; no apology to make; I had done no wrong." The gentleman, in whose house I was now a prisoner, was a man of great influence in the town; and it was more than the poor constable's place was worth to refuse to take me into custody. My English blood was now up, and after again refusing to beg pardon, and boldly telling them "a piece of my mind," I strode off, with a proud step and a haughty heart, cheerfully to prison. I could have run off if I had chosen from the poor, palsy, short-winded old constable, and soon have left him far behind, but my proud soul rebelled at such an act; I knew I had done no wrong. Poor old fellow! he followed, coughing at every step, his perforated lantern throwing a hundred rays of light upon the snow; he put in the great key, and with a harsh grating sound the heavy door flew open, and there was I a prisoner. After lighting a good fire, and asking me if I should be frightened to be left alone for a few minutes, while he went home to get a drop of something to

comfort him, and to fetch his tobacco-box, he departed; and there was I, at last, a real solitary prisoner, made fast by bolt and bar. I well knew that my mother would feel no uneasiness about my absence, as I had frequently slept at the house where I had spent the evening; and as to my companions, I had no doubt that, after having run on a little way and not seeing me come, they had concluded that I had returned home in another direction. The old constable returned, and bore me company; and after chatting with me a little time, whilst he smoked his pipe, and finding that I began to grow sleepy, he persuaded me to lie down upon the trucklebed which stood in the prison, and throwing his rough coat over me, I was soon sound asleep. With daylight came my mother, for I have no doubt but that the party who had caused me to be so unjustly imprisoned began to feel uneasy about the matter, so had told her where I was. I was firm, and determined to see the end of it. And although the worthy old magistrate lived above two miles off, he was sent for. He came, and I appeared before him. I need not say how he reprimanded the party who had so unjustly caused my imprisonment; nor how the kind-hearted old man read a portion of a long act to me, out of an old law-book, to show that I had done wrong in carrying an unlawful weapon through the streets at midnight. And so, after many apologies from the party who had so wrongly acted in causing my brief imprisonment, my adventure ended. But it was with great difficulty that my uncle could be dissuaded from bringing an action against the party, for he vowed he would see me righted if it ruined him: although I endeavoured to persuade him that all the wrong I had suffered was in sleeping for a few hours on a strange bed in a prison; and for this I had my reward, in the consciousness that I had neither done any harm, nor yet betrayed my companions; who, I must add, came nobly forward the next morning, and pleaded guilty to the paltry offence of which I was accused.

THE STOCK-DOVE.

But the narration of my boyish adventures is carrying me away from my descriptions of Spring, with all its birds and flowers, beautiful scenes, and sweet sounds, none of which delighted me more than the low dreamy cooing of the



STOCK-DOVE,

as we used to call one of our native wild pigeons, which built just such an open and careless nest, as I have before described to you. Montagu tells an anecdote about one of these wood-pigeons and a magpie, which, he says, is an old Suffolk fable: "The magpie once undertook to teach the pigeon to build a better nest; but the pigeon kept crying out, 'Take two, Taffy! take two!'" The magpie kept still proceeding, like a good workman, with only one stick at a time, though the stock-dove still called out, 'Take two, take two!' which cry at last so annoyed the magpie, that he exclaimed, 'I say that one stick at a time is enough; and if you think otherwise, you may finish the work yourself, for I will not.' So mag left the stock-dove to complete the nest after her own slovenly manner.

There is a very ancient rhyme—I cannot tell you how old it is—which says,

“April showers
Bring May flowers:”

neither can I tell you the names of half the flowers that they do bring; but I remember well, when a boy, I used to set out alone to try how many different kinds of flowers I could gather in a single morning, confining myself to only two or three of the same kind; and I have often returned with a whole handful, many of the names of which I did not know, but amongst them were the clover-flowers, white and red; daisies, of every tinge of crimson; buttercups, yellow as gold; great marsh marigolds, as big as the brass buttons on my grandad's coat; primroses, pale, sweet, and beautiful; lady-smocks, “all silver-white,” as Shakspeare has described them; a beautiful flower that we called the crow's-foot; orchises, that looked like bees, and resembled, in form and colour, other insects; cowslips, still my favourite amongst wild flowers; lilies of the valley, with which our woods were covered; violets, oh, how sweet! anemones, that seemed to grow everywhere; the ivy-leaved speedwell, ever beautiful; arums, which we called lords and ladies, and robins and bobbins, and which, when children, we rarely ever gathered without repeating the following lines, though what they had to do with the arum I have yet to learn:—

“Robin-a-bobbin, a bilberry ben,
Eat more meat than threescore men;
He eat a bull, and eat a calf;
Then under the hedge
He did himself wedge,
And vowed he had n't enough by half.”

This curious plant, I must tell you, is also well known in the country by the name of “Robin-in-the-hedge,” for under hedges it is most commonly found. Blue-bells we could lie down and roll in, for the neighbouring plantations were covered with

them. Then there was the yellow and starred celandine, that is so often mistaken for the buttercup, which it only resembles in colour; and the saxifrage, purple and white. These are about all I knew the names of, when a boy; for I must not include the blossoms of the sloe and hawthorn, and the golden buds of the gorse, in my wild posy, although I seldom failed to stick a sprig of each in the centre, where they towered above like the plumes of a tall chieftain. Then I gathered numbers of others whose names I am unacquainted with, even now; and every year I still keep adding to my stock of knowledge, as you will see in my description of Summer and Autumn, where I mention a few more of the flowers which bloom at those seasons of the year; for there were not so many cheap and good works descriptive of flowers, in my boyish days, as there are now, and such as there were, chiefly contained hard Latin names, which I could not clearly understand; so I went blundering onward, like a bee, from one to the other, and gathering knowledge about them as I best could. But I became acquainted with many old men and women who were herbalists, and whom I often talked with while they were out gathering herbs and flowers; and from them I learned many things which, otherwise, I should never have known; for there are many healing virtues in plants and herbs which are highly beneficial to man. And some of those old herbalists used to make me smile while they talked about these things, and how such and such herbs were only good when gathered at certain hours, and under certain planets, which I was very hard in believing in. And I believe now that our ancestors only said that we must wash our faces in may-dew before the sun arose, to give us a fresh colour that would last, that they might induce us to rise early in the mornings, and not lie in bed after the sun had risen. For, in those old-fashioned days, they breakfasted at six, and dined at eleven; and they used to say, that

SPRING.

“Early to bed, and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

Thomson has in one beautiful line described the boundary which divides, yet seems to blend into the two seasons, and in which he describes a country

“Half pranked with Spring, with Summer half-imbrowned.”

The truth of this line will strike every boy, who looks upon the change which every week produces towards the end of Spring. He will no longer discover the short green grass which grew side by side with the daisies; but in place of this will observe how the grass itself has grown up into flower and seed, tall and grey, and rustling beneath every breeze that blows, and already ripe for the hay-harvest. He will notice a brown rusty look upon the may-blossoms, which tells that their beauty has departed with the expiring Spring. He will see that the fine light green, which gave such a tender freshness to the foliage of the trees, is deepening into the darker umbrage which Summer hangs over her bowers: he will notice how many flowers have already faded and died away, and how others of a richer bloom and deeper dye, are stepping in to fill up their places; he will observe how many a bird that poured forth its full-throated melody through April and May, is hidden and silent somewhere in the leafy coverts of June; for even the nightingale, that favourite bird of the poets, which singeth all night long, is only heard in Spring, while it chants “in shadiest covert hid,” loving especially those places where the tall spotted cowslips grow. Sweet it is to wander forth in these pleasant evenings, and to watch the moon journeying on, like a lonely traveller, over the unbounded plain of heaven—when we cannot see what flowers we are treading upon, for the shadows that sleep beneath the trees. Then to know that the same song has been listened to, by kings and queens who have passed away long ages ago; perhaps had made glad

“The sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn,”

whom we read about in the Bible. To know that great poets have listened to it, and written in its praise—that Milton has said even “Silence was so pleased,” she became more hushed while hearkening unto it, is surely to make us more in love with the song of this beautiful bird, about which I could quote as many exquisite passages of poetry, as would fill a dozen pages of this book. But whilst I am thinking about the poets, I will give you Spenser’s description of a butterfly, that set out for a whole day’s pleasure, and what he did with himself, and where he went to. Spenser you know wrote the beautiful poem which is entitled “The Faery Queen,” and which you ought to read on account of the many exquisite descriptions it contains, of sweet country scenery, and knights in armour who fought many battles, and old enchanters who went about doing mischief, and the fair Una who was followed by a milk-white lamb, and sometimes had a lion for her companion, with many more wonderful and romantic things which I have not space to tell you about. But lest you should dislike his old-fashioned mode of spelling words, and not clearly understand some of his beautiful images, I will turn his description of this butterfly that went out for a long day’s pleasure, into common prose, bidding you, however, to remember that all the beautiful thoughts are Spenser’s, and not mine. Well then, “This butterfly being all ready dressed (as you well know), got up from the flower on which he had been sleeping all night, and giving his mealy wings a shake, just to scatter the dew off them, set out for a day’s pleasure. He went on over the fields at a good pace, and whenever he soared a little higher than common and saw the whole wide country, he said in the lustiness of his heart, ‘I possess all, there is no one to gainsay me, no one to envy me. I can feed bounteously upon every flower that stretches out before me.’ Then he went over the woods, and rivers, and the

meadows green, with his air-cutting wings; he tried the mountains and the rank grassy fens, but none of these seemed to please his dainty fancy, so he hurried off into the gay gardens, where he knew he could riot to excess. When he arrived there, he began to fly about from bed to bed, and from one border to another, surveying every thing with his curious and busy eye, but only tasting tenderly, without disordering any of the flowers, or even defacing their silken leaves with his light and delicate feet. Sometimes he sucked at the sap, sometimes at the dew which still lay on them like rounded pearls, and in it he also bathed his feet; and so having breakfasted deliciously, he settled like a folded peablossom upon the branch of a flower, to rest and sun himself a little while, and to dry his moistened wings, which you know would be rather wet after dabbling about in the morning dew, on which he breakfasted." But I am sure I have quoted enough to make you like Spenser's writings, without extracting more, or naming all the flowers which the poet enumerates that he he lunched and dined upon, and amongst them, in one beautiful line, he mentions

"The roses reigning in the pride of May."

And then having summed up this kingly banquet of rich flowers the poet says in another beautiful verse, which I shall not alter, for it is so much like asking you what can be pleasanter than a delightful ramble into the country, where for the time you may fancy, like the butterfly, that every thing around is your own,

"What more felicity can fill a creature,
Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
And to be lord of all the works of Nature?
To reign in the air, from the earth to highest sky,
To feed on flowers, and weeds of glorious feature?
To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
Who rests not pleas'd with such happiness,
Will worthy be to taste of wretchedness."

Although we cannot trespass like the butterfly, and take what ever pleases us, still we can enjoy more delight amid our liberty, than any beautiful insect can appreciate, because we are gifted with higher powers of enjoyment, can look up from creation to the Great Creator, and understand more of this wonderful world. But the butterfly reminds me of the woods in Spring, and the



WOOD-CUTTERS

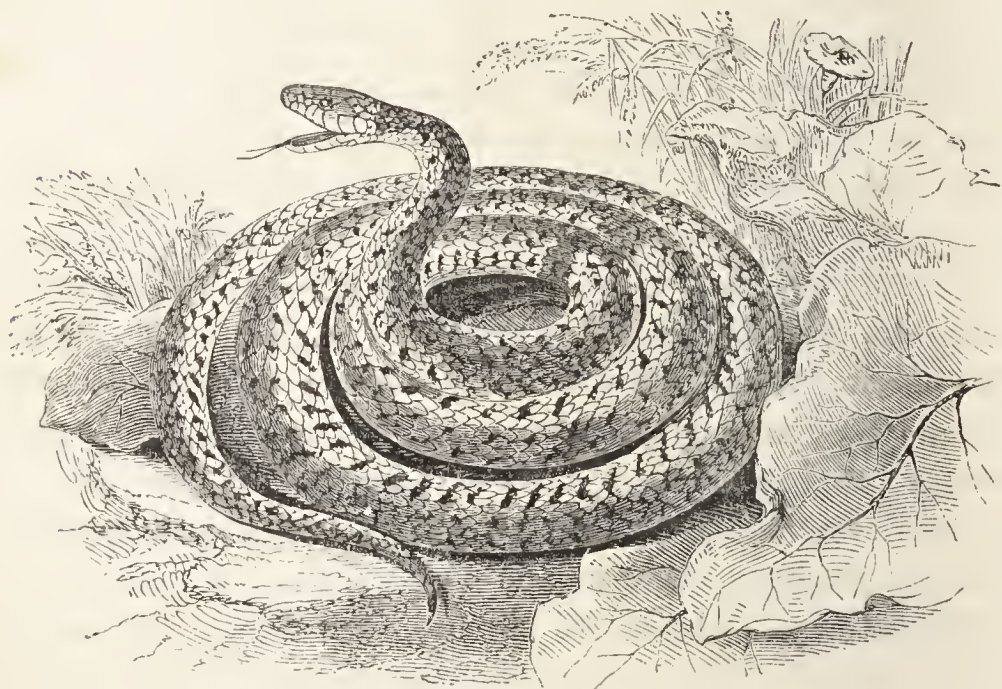
and bark-peelers: men who had a forest-like smell about their garments; who, week after week, rain or fair, went out every morning into the woods, and never returned again until night, but spent all the day among nests, and birds, and flowers,—who saw squirrels run above their heads, and rabbits across their path, without wondering,—who talked about foxes, and polecats, and badgers, and weasels, as if they were but every-day objects; and brought us home nests full of little, white, downy owls, and sharp-beaked hawks, that pecked savagely at our finger-ends, before even they were half-fledged: men who sat down on the trunks of large old

trees, which they had felled, and ate their meals,—who stripped the bark of a tree which contained a nest-full of young ones, quite as unconcerned as if no such little home had been constructed among its branches. Proud was that boy, who was a favourite amongst the bark-peelers, who was privileged to enter the woods at any time to peep into the great stacks of branches and bark which they had piled together, and to hunt for nests amid the thick underwood which they had left untouched, saving around the stems of the trees they had barked. Then there was a strange, wild, and ghastly look about that part of the wood where they had stripped naked all the trees; it looked like a land filled with great white skeletons, made more striking through the surrounding gloom which remained untouched, for it seemed as if an unnatural light fell upon the unearthly forms which had so suddenly sprung up amid the silence and solitude of the forest. Many a pleasant ride had we in the wagons, to and from the woods, to fetch home the bark, as load after load was brought and deposited upon the wharfs by the river-side, ready to be shipped off, and sold to the tanners, who would be unable to make the leather we wear so durable, unless the oak-trees were barked for this purpose. Oh! what a treat it was to ride home on those high and heavily laden wagons, to lie flat down on the load, and feel the topmost boughs of the trees sweeping over our backs, as we passed through the woods, to touch the ends of the high extending branches with our hands, and to know that the wings of wild birds were all that ever before swept over those sprays—to be nearly on a level with the nests which we saw amid the branches, and to touch the end of some bough that projected from a huge, bulging, and knotted trunk, up which we had never been able to climb! These were indeed delights, such as only a thorough-bred country-boy can fully appreciate.

Snakes were also there, which had awakened from their wintry sleep and come out from under dead leaves, and the

hollow roots of trees; and these we saw basking in the sunshine on sandy banks, in the warm and open corners of woods, and on heaths and commons, near water-courses; where they fed upon young birds, eggs, mice, and small lizards, but above all upon the poor little frogs, which appear to be their favourite food. The snake lays eggs which are fastened together by a glutinous matter, often consisting of as many as twenty in number, and these are left to be hatched by the heat of the sun, on a warm bed of leaves, some sunny spot on the bank, or very frequently on a dung-heap, just where the snake chances to deposit them. You should only see one in pursuit of a frog; how the poor little thing tries to leap away, taking shorter and shorter strides every time it jumps, and uttering a shrill pitiable cry, as if it said, “I know it’s no use trying, he is sure to have me at last—oh deary me! I see his long jaws open, his bright unmerciful eyes fixed upon me; two or three more leaps and I am done for! and now he has got hold of my hinder leg, and now I feel I am going bit by bit, first on one side, and then on the other,—oh how dark it is getting! I can scarcely see at all, one more movement on the right side of the jaw, and another on the left, and then I’m gone for ever.” And sometimes it has so chanced that when the snake has happened to gape, after it has swallowed its prey, the poor little frog has jumped out of its mouth again, all alive and kicking, and made its escape. There are instances on record of two snakes seizing on the same frog at a time, one commencing with its head, and the other with its hinder feet: and oh! didn’t they shake one another when their heads chanced to meet, until at last one gave the other a bite on the upper lip, no doubt also making the poor frog squeak a little harder, as if it said to the other snake, “There, take that for your share,” while he very leisurely swallowed his victim whole. Oh, what beautiful swimmers they are! carrying the head and neck above the water while they pass through it, and gliding here and there with all the ease and

freedom of an eel. Then the snakes cast their skins too, shoving the head and neck into some small prickly cavity, either between the close and tangling branches of the bramble, the speary points of the sharp thorn-bush, or the biting and armed sprigs of the furze or gorse, which lay hold of those portions of the skin that are already loose about the head and neck, as you might with your fingers lay hold of the top of your stocking, and thus turn it inside out, at the same time you pulled it off; for so does the snake get rid of his old coat, and without either going to be measured, or troubling the tailor, he glides away with the new one already made upon his back. The

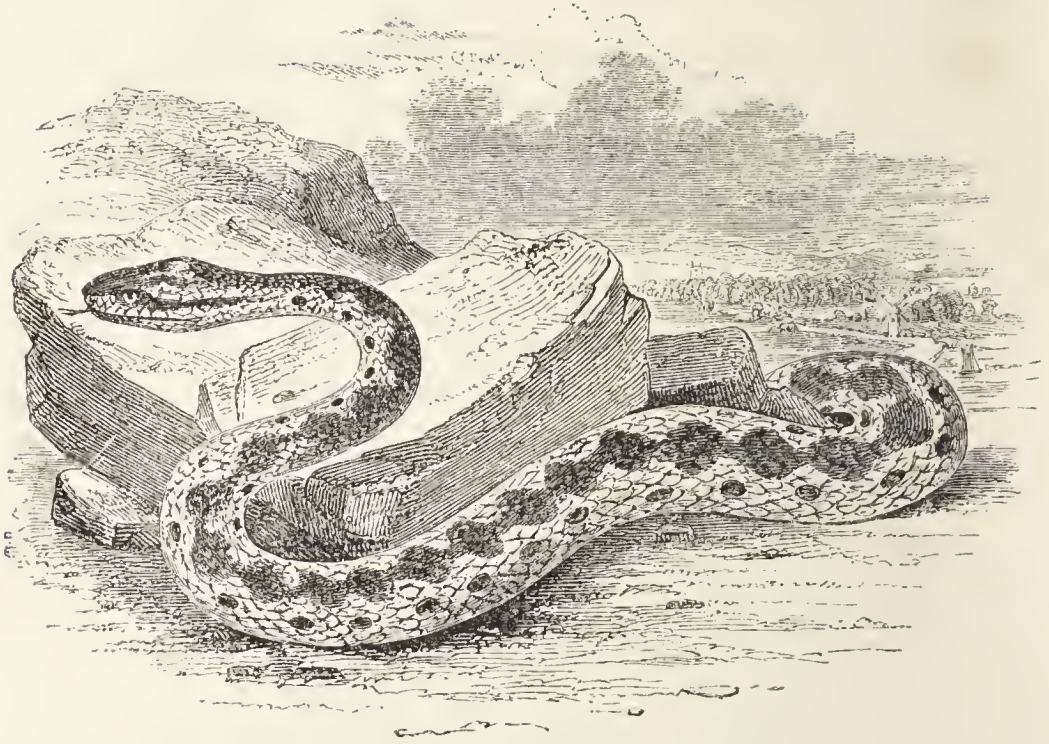


COMMON SNAKE

is perfectly harmless, and may not only be tamed, but will also readily distinguish those who feed it: and Mr. Bell, in his "History of British Reptiles," says, that he had one in his possession which knew him from all other persons, and which would come out of its box, crawl up his coat-sleeve, and there

lie still, enjoying the warmth which his arm afforded it: that it would also come to his hand every morning for a draught of milk, of its own accord; but would hiss and fly at strangers if they attempted to meddle with it. Snakes are sometimes found three and even four feet in length; and are in every way as harmless as an eel, for they possess not the poisonous and venomous fangs, which belong to the viper.

And now I must tell you that the Viper is the only poisonous and venomous reptile known in England, and that it bears in appearance so close a resemblance to the harmless snake, that I am afraid were I to attempt to describe the difference in the two, you would still not be able to distinguish them, however carefully I might do it; for it is not true to say that all vipers are black, for some of them are marked even more beautifully than the common snakes. But dangerous as the bite of the viper may be, I believe that there are very few instances, if any, on record, in which it is known to have produced death. I shall however, by the aid of the work I have already alluded to, endeavour to make you acquainted with the formidable fangs by which the poisonous bite is inflicted. Instead, then, of the outer row of teeth which are found in the harmless snake, the viper also possesses on each side of its upper jaw two or three long, sharp, curved teeth, the largest of which is attached to a small moveable bone, and can easily be erected by a muscular power which the reptile possesses. Unless when angry, this dreadful tooth falls back, and rests upon the jaw, where it is covered by a fold of skin; but when about to bite, it is shot out, and projects downward in a moment, where it stands firm as the point of a spear. And down a groove which runs along the tooth, the poison is shot from a bag, which is connected with its root, and, at the very moment it bites, is struck into the wound: and when this is the case, the safest remedy is to rub the part bitten with oil, and to swallow a small portion of ammonia. When the



VIPER

is about to bite, it draws up its body into a close coil, bends back its neck as if to gather more force, and then darts forth its head in an instant,—so quick indeed, that you can scarcely perceive the action; for the bite is inflicted, and the head again withdrawn, all in one brief moment. I have only to add that boys should be very careful in handling snakes, for it is not easy to distinguish them from vipers: so the best plan is to allow them to escape, for neither the one nor the other will meddle with you, if you let them alone.

Although with all their poverty, I believe that the children of the poor pass their time more happily than those amid walled cities; yet many of them undergo great hardships, and suffer many privations, such as are undreamed of by boys who have only passed their lives in the streets of busy towns; and I will tell you how a little sister and brother were often left for days together, while their parents wandered about the country hawking goods, by the sale of which they obtained a

livelihood. They kept a little tilted cart, and a rough shaggy pony, whose uncombed and uncurried hair turned up and down, and was matted, and knotted, and twisted together in hard lumps; for it had never been rubbed or cleaned down from the first day it was purchased by them. The dirt had gathered about it through dragging its heavy load along cross-country roads, and was left to dry on, or fall off, just as chance directed; or when the pony took it into his head to have a roll now and then upon the road, or to give himself a hearty shaking, by way of variety, just as the humour possessed him. And sometimes the pony, children, and cart were left for days together on the edge of some broad open common, by the side of some wild uninhabited moorland, or the skirts of a wood, or at the end of some green and remote lane; while the pony, with a long rope attached to his leg, and the other end fastened into the ground with a strong stake, picked up what he could within the limits in which he was secured, until the spot around was nearly eaten bare, when the peg was again removed, and he was permitted to graze in another new and limited pasture. And often while their poor parents wandered away with their heavy loads upon their heads, from village to village, they left their children a loaf or two within the cart, a little coffee, oatmeal, and sugar, a tin saucepan, and a tinder-box; and as they always contrived to leave them near some clear water-course, and as there was plenty of dried fuel to be found about the neighbourhood, they managed in the best way they could; and in the Spring time they frequently wandered away from the cart, to gather the wild flowers which grew around, and to watch the little birds which built and sung, and flew in and out of the wild bushes, trees, and hedges. But little Nell was not so hardy as her brother Ned, and as one Spring chanced to set in very wet, and as they were but poorly clad, and poorly fed, and neither of them had shoes to their feet, she caught a dreadful cold, and suffered under a

severe cough, which soon settled down upon her lungs, and she became very ill, and lost all spirit to play. Although Ned doubled the little rug which covered them at night, that his sister might be warmer, while he himself laid upon the straw at the bottom of the cart without any thing over him, still she could not sleep, but lay coughing all night long; and he often got up in the night, lighted the fire with the furze-bushes which he gathered on the common beside the wood, and made her something warm to comfort her; but all was of no avail. It was on a Wednesday night that the rain came down heavily, pouring in through the holes of the old weather-beaten tilt which covered the cart, until it drenched the straw on which the poor girl lay, and soaked through the rug that covered her. She complained of cold and thirst, and he got up as usual to kindle a fire, but the rain had filled the tinder-box, and he could procure no light. Soon after daylight on Thursday morning she died; and all he could do was to sit beside the dead body of his little sister in the cart and weep, for he knew that his parents would not return until Saturday night, and if he put the pony into the shafts, he did not know where to go in search of them: and he was fearful they would not know where to find him when they returned; so he had nothing to do but sit down and cry beside his dead sister in the cart. Night came rainy and dark, and he was still alone, with no one to speak to him now; and although he was very cold, he felt that his sister was colder, and doubled up the rug, to make it thicker, to keep her warm, until his parents returned; for he thought she was still asleep. Poor little fellow! he was too young to know what death was, for no one had ever talked to him about death or heaven; nor had he ever before seen any one dead. Sometimes he thought he would try to awaken her; but then he knew he could not kindle a fire, nor get any thing warm to comfort her, so felt glad that she still slept; though he could not help weeping bitterly when he spoke to

her, and she answered him not. "She will be sure to be hungry and awaken in the morning," he thought; and putting the wet tinder into his bosom to dry, he laid down beside her, and long before daylight he had sobbed himself to sleep, holding her thin cold hands between his own. Alas! he knew not that little Nell would never awake again. When he awoke on the second morning after her death, the sun shone out bright and beautiful, and the little birds were singing their sweet anthems from the neighbouring wood, and the primroses upon the banks opened out broad and beautiful; and having kissed her, and spoken to her, and found that she did not answer him, he got up to gather her a posy of wild flowers, thinking how much they would please her when she awakened; for those which they had collected together, before little Nell was taken ill, lay withered, and drooping, and dead beside her, in the cart. When he returned, and found she was not yet awake, he put them upon her bosom, and placed them between her hands, thinking how pleased she would be when her little eyes opened, and the first thing she saw was such a beautiful posy of sweet-smelling flowers. The tinder-box was now dry, and he lighted a fire, and prepared their breakfast, as he had many a time done; and when all was ready, he shook her, and tried to awaken her; but the wild flowers only rolled from off her bosom, while her arms dropped down stiff and motionless, for he knew not that she had no power to move; so he left the breakfast untasted, and sat down and wept again until the evening came.

That long night passed away like the other in sorrow and in silence; and although no one came near him, neither had he heard the sound of a human voice since she last spoke, yet he was not afraid, for he felt that his sister was still with him, and he knew not that the sleep she slept was the long unbroken quietness of death;—even had he known, he had no cause to fear, for she who lay so tranquilly beside him had ever loved him,

with almost more than a childish love, for he was a year older than his sister, and they had been left alone so often together, that little Nell would have wept more for his absence, than she would have done for her parents, had they remained away for weeks together; for the father and mother were so poor and were so much away, that the children knew not what the comforts of home were, had never celebrated a birthday, or sat down to a holiday-feast in their lives, nor partaken of those endearments and household affections which so many of you enjoy. Roughly nursed, and having had from childhood to battle their way through the hardships of the world, their parents took neither thought nor care about treating them differently to what they themselves had been treated; believing wrongfully that hunger and hardship are the only heritage of the poor; for they possessed not the finer feelings, which teach us that the bitterness of poverty and privation may be sweetened by the tender offices of love. Not that their parents were naturally hard-hearted; but nursed in the cold, hard lap of poverty themselves, and left at an early age to beg, or starve, or earn a livelihood as they best could, they wrongfully considered that they did their duty if they only provided their children with food, which was almost more than their parents had done for them. Further, they had imbibed an evil habit of drinking, a vice which they never endeavoured to uproot, and by so doing, they spent many a shilling which would have added to their children's happiness, and which might have provided them with a good education and a comfortable home. But these were things which they themselves had never known, and never cared to feel the need of; so they went on, just living from hand to mouth, and storing up no provision for the morrow, and there are too many in this world like them. All those two poor children had ever had to make them happy, was the love they bore to each other, sweetened by the pleasure of rambling about, and gathering flowers in the sunshine, and chasing the birds and butterflies about the

wild woods and heaths, wherever they chanced to be stationed, until their parents chose to return.

And now Saturday came ; but poor little Ned was so weak, through not having tasted any food for the two preceding days, that he was unable to leave the cart ; and when his parents returned in the evening, they found him lying down beside his dead sister, holding one of her cold hands within his own, and weeping bitterly. And when they gazed upon little Nell, they thought how grievously they had neglected her, and wished that she were alive again that they might behave more kindly to her ; but all their wishes and tears were now in vain : and from that moment they began to act more tenderly towards the child that was still remaining behind. They had no family grave to bear her to, for their parents had been buried in some close city churchyard, amid numberless other unknown and crowded graves ; neither had they any money to pay for her funeral, or they would have buried her in the village churchyard which lay not far distant from the place where she died : so the father dug her a little grave near the pleasant greenwood side : no solemn bell was tolled, no peaceful prayers were breathed over her innocent body, but where the sweet birds sung, and the wildflowers waved, and the long leaves whispered to the passing breeze, there heaved up the green turf that covered the grave of little Nell : and over his sister's grave Ned planted the fairest primroses ; and many a summer after did their parents come there, with their little cart, and often in the solemn stillness of the sabbath might the voice of Ned, who was now able to read, be heard, reading passages from the holy Scriptures to his parents, while they sat, silent and attentive, gazing upon the grave of little Nell ;—for although they still led the same wandering life, a great change had come over them since her death, and they often talked about her long brown hair which streamed out when she ran here and there in the sunshine, and of those little bright eyes which will never open again until the

last trumpet sounds, and the dead are awakened from their long sleep. The spot where little Nell was buried, to me, had always a solemn look; for, near it, there flowed an old river, whose banks were frequented by the



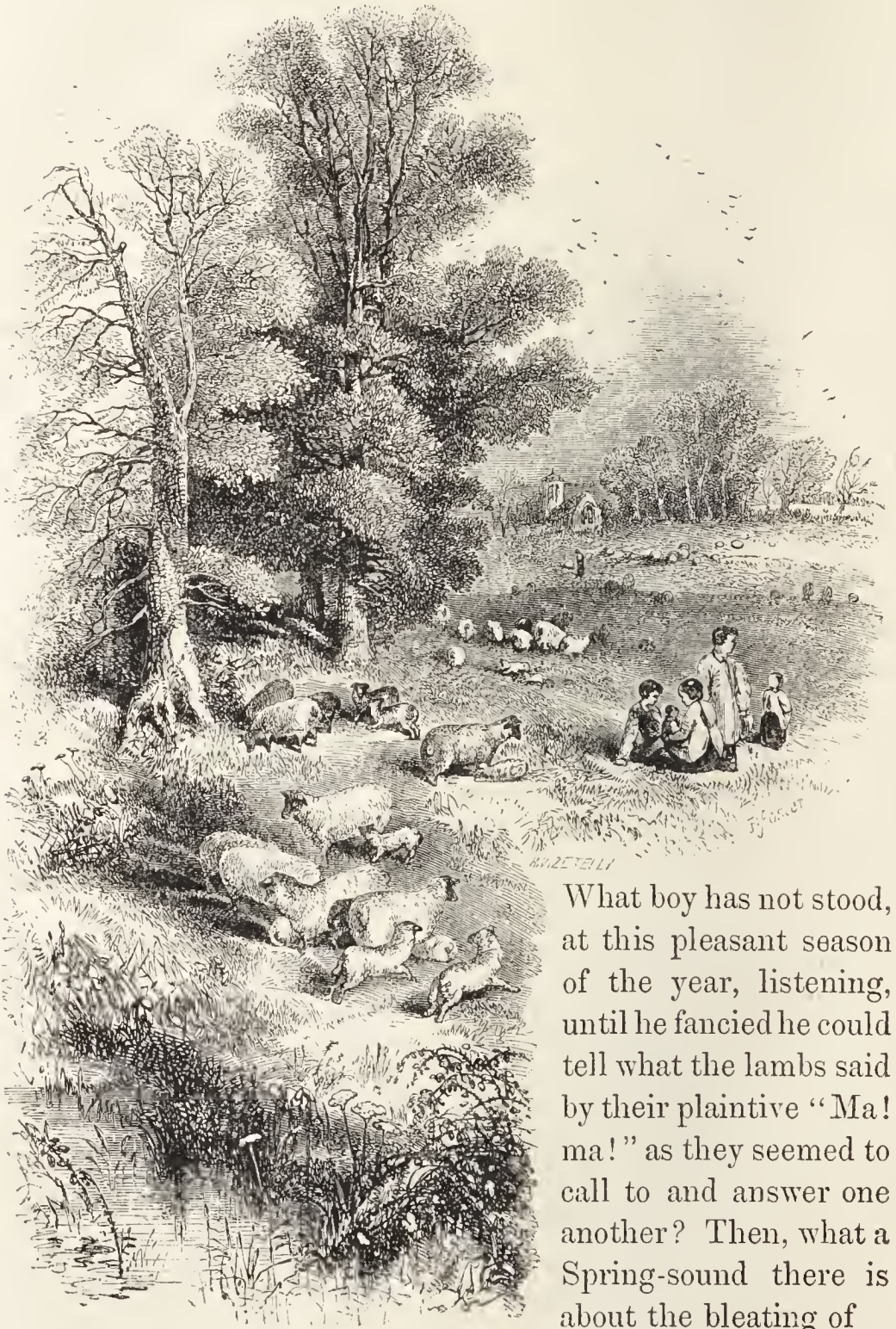
CURLEW;

and on the air, its shrill wild whistle seemed to float like a wailing sound; for so it appeared to me, while I gazed upon that little grave. And there we often wandered, in search of the curlew's nest, which we generally discovered built upon some dry spot on the ground, and formed of grass and leaves, in a very slovenly manner. The eggs were of a pale, olive hue, spotted with brown; and the young can run almost as soon as they are hatched. This bird is rather beautifully marked, the head, neck, and wings being of a pale brown, but in the middle of each feather varied by a black mark, then edging off into a light colour; while the breast is dotted with long black spots,

and the tail and upper coverts of the wings are barred with yellowish white and black. Its cry is very peculiar, and there is something very wild about it, when heard mingling with the murmuring of the waves on the sea shore, which it frequently visits in Winter, to feed upon small crabs and marine insects.

There is another curious bird which I must make you acquainted with, and that is the Nuthatch. And if you were to hear him pecking with his sharp beak against a bough in the wood, as we often did, you would fancy that somebody was striking one of the trees with a hammer, such a loud and successive tapping does he keep up, as he walks round and round the bough; for he is like a fly, and can just as well stand with his feet up as down; while you expect every moment that he will fall with his back upon the ground and break it: but he knows better than that, and keeping a firm hold with his sharp claws, he pecks away with his heels uppermost, and makes all the wood ring again. Oh, you should see how soon he will work a hole into a hard nut, which he places in some hollow in the bark of the trees, while up and down goes his beak like the head of a hammer; and he will sometimes cut a filbert as clean across the middle, as if it had been split by a sharp instrument. Some say this sound is produced by the woodpecker; but as this bird generally selects a soft wood to peck a hole in, I scarcely think it would make so loud a noise as the other does while hammering at a hard nut. The Woodpecker is, however, a beautiful and curious bird, richly marked with black and white and green and a dim yellow, and it will peck out a hole in a decayed tree as round as if it had been worked out with a pair of compasses, and at the bottom of this hole it lays its eggs, and brings up its young ones: and I have known boys cruel enough to block up the hole with a handful of clay, after having watched the old bird enter; as if, by such a foolish act, they hoped to capture her, which is very difficult, as the hole is too small and too deep to thrust the hand in and get at the eggs. The woodpecker is very partial to ants' eggs, and you may occasionally see them busily employed in

feeding about an ant-hill. They lay four or five beautiful little eggs



What boy has not stood, at this pleasant season of the year, listening, until he fancied he could tell what the lambs said by their plaintive "Ma! ma!" as they seemed to call to and answer one another? Then, what a Spring-sound there is about the bleating of

YOUNG LAMBS IN THE FIELD.

How amusing it is to watch their dams, to hear their answers; as if they said, "Well, well, I'm here; I wo'n't leave you. You shouldn't run off so far to play;" and then she continues to nibble the short, sweet grass, which as yet is scarcely higher than the milk-white daisies, until she is again disturbed by the "Ma! ma!" of her little runaway, who has, perhaps, been running a race with a lot more little white, woolly companions, none of whom are above a month old. Then three or four of them miss their mothers all at once, and, oh! what a bleating they do but make, as they run about here and there, and every where, scarcely knowing what to do; and when they do find their dams, they are so delighted that they seem almost ready to leap out of their skins for very joy. And then you could almost imagine, as the old mothers rub their heads against the lambs, uttering a low, internal sound, that they were chiding them for going so far; for, how can we tell, whilst they recognise each other's voices, but what they can even understand what is said, and, in their way, converse together. Bloomfield, in his beautiful and simple poem, entitled, "The Farmer's Boy" (which I earnestly beg of you all to read), has given a most graphic description of young lambs racing, a few lines of which I here quote:—

"Each seems to say, 'Come, let us try our speed!'
 Away they scour, impetuous, ardent, strong,
 The green turf trembling as they bound along;
 Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
 Where every mole-hill is a bed of thyme;
 There panting stop; yet scarcely can refrain,—
 A bird, a leaf, will set them off again;
 Or if a gale with strength unusual blow,
Scattering the wild-brier roses into snow,
 Their little limbs increasing efforts try."

You will not fail to notice the beautiful line which I have marked in italics. Just fancy a sudden gust of wind blowing down in a moment a whole shower of the blossoms of the

wild roses from the hedge, and driving them over the grass like a snow-drift! What a consternation such an unexpected movement must create amongst a dozen or two of little lambs, who have never before witnessed such a sight! What a running and a scampering must it make amongst them! and if sheep do laugh at all, how the old, fond mothers must enjoy such a scene! But, to gaze on such pleasant pictures as these, is only one amongst the many delights of Spring; for, not only is the eye delighted, but every other sense is also gratified. We inhale the fragrance of the hawthorn, which, of all delightful smells, is, perhaps the healthiest and the sweetest; we hear on every side the singing of the birds, making together such a varied concert, so low, and loud, and sweet, that, together with the rustling of the young leaves in the wind, the softened murmur of the glittering waters, and the swaying of countless thousands of field-flowers of all hues to and fro, we seem to be out in a fairy world, a region of enchantment, a grand garden, only walled round by the sky, and in which we may wander onward and onward for evermore! Then what signs of future plenty do the orchards hang out! what visions of cherries, and pears, and plums, and apples, do we see in the silver blossoms! We can half fancy which will be a red-cheeked apple, by the crimson with which the bloom is dyed; and, as the season advances, we can trace the rounded green of the cherries, which we know a few weeks of sunshine will make mellow and ruby-red, and we unconsciously lick our lips, and take off our caps, as if we felt a bumping pound dropping heavily into the deep lining! Then come those thick-beaked bullfinches. Oh! they are such thieves! Bless you, they eat pounds and pounds of cherries before they come to perfection, for they prefer them green and without the stones; and a dozen or two of these great thick-headed fellows will strip nearly every fruit-bud off a cherry-tree in a single morning.

BULLFINCHES.

You need only look under one of the trees on which they have been feeding, to satisfy yourself of the havoc they make; for you will find the ground covered over with remains of the buds they have rejected. So dainty are they in their banquet, and so well known for these destructive qualities that in some places they are called, "Pick-a-buds." The engraving I here present you with, is the



NEST OF THE BULLFINCH.

This bird often selects the fine twigs of the birch-tree, which it weaves together in a loose and irregular manner, giving you more the idea of a rough gap, which some countryman has negligently filled up in the opening of a hedge, instead of the neat-looking woven work of a practised hurdle-maker, though we have seen an instance or two of their nests built very neatly. The eggs are of a bluish white, principally speckled and streaked with purple, generally about four in number, and very little larger than those of the linnet. The bullfinch is a beautifully-marked bird, and when caught, may, with care and attention, be taught a variety of tunes.

There is a beautiful lively bird, which may be met with at

almost any season of the year, in the neighbourhood of the sea-coast, called the



RINGED DOTTEREL:

when squatting down, its plumage is so much in keeping with the colour of the rock, and stone, and sand upon the sea-beach, that it is almost difficult to recognise it from the natural objects by which it is surrounded. Among the loose pebbles which strew the beach, or in the sand-banks of the neighbouring rivers that open out into the sea, do they lay their greenish-coloured eggs and bring forth their young. Their note is a shrill sad whistle, and like the peewit, they are seldom silent, and with every breeze that blows, and every wave that comes welling and lapping upon the shore, is their wailing sound mingled in any locality which they haunt in numbers. Its plumage is very peculiar, underneath its head and throat there is a collar of pure white, and below this a broad band encircles the whole surface of its breast and neck—this is again diversified by the under portion being of clear white, while the ends of the wings and tails are banded with black, brown, and a dullish kind of grey.

You have all heard of May-day and May-games ; and although they are merry old customs which are fast fading away, yet, when I tell you that there are two maypoles still standing near the neighbourhood in which I spent my boyish days, you will like to know something about this ancient English holiday. Our ancestors used to rise early to welcome in this sweet season of the year, and with joyous shouts and merry music bring home may. They decorated the tall maypole with gaudy garlands, made of ribbons and flowers ; they erected a green arbour, and selected some comely village-girl whom they crowned as Queen of May, and they danced and made merry upon the village-green to welcome in the month of flowers. Even in the olden time kings and queens, accompanied by their titled attendants, left their palaces and their castles, and rode forth into the still green country, to gather the sweet may-blossoms : and the poet Herrick in a later day tells us how, in honour of May, the streets were trimmed with trees and made green, until they looked like a park ; that over the porch and door of each house there hung a fresh bough, amid which branches of the may-blossoms were neatly interwoven ; and that ere the sun had well risen, many a boy and girl had returned from the woods laden with may, and brought back with them an eager appetite to enjoy their breakfast of cakes and cream. And Spenser, a much older poet, also informs us how the young folks used to flock out in the early morning to gather may-bushes and sweetbrier, with which they returned home and decorated their houses and the pillars of the church ; and how they crowned the King and Queen of May with flowers, and went and came to and fro the green wood, accompanied with such sweet music that it made his very heart dance to hear it. Nor must I omit to tell you that in summer-time our ancestors strewed the floors with rushes ; and that, while the branches were green and the flowers in season, they rose early in the sweet mornings of Spring and Summer, and brought home from the fields and woods, and hills and val-

leys, many a beautiful branch covered with leaves and blossoms, and many an armful of fragrant flowers, gathered while yet the dew hung fresh and heavy upon them; and with these, they decorated the interior of their buildings, making them so sweet and green that it must have been as pleasant to have sat in those old parlours and ancient halls, as in a beautiful garden summer-house, covered with woodbine and surrounded with moss-roses.

Even only last Spring while rambling among the villages in the county of Surrey, and not more than two or three hours, walk from London itself, I passed several groups of neatly-dressed boys and girls, on the morning of May-day, who were carrying large garlands composed of branches and flowers and ribbons,—reminding me pleasantly that the old May-day customs were not yet dead, and filling my mind with cheerful images of by-gone days; bringing before me the merry England which our ancient poets have enshrined in their immortal songs. And now whilst I recall the scene, it seems like gazing upon some beautiful picture, where a group of neatly-clad little maidens, with their snow-white caps decorated with ribbons, stand with their richly coloured May-garland on the fore-ground of the scene, between a green and open space surrounded on every side with tall gorse-bushes, which look as if countless thousands of golden-coloured butterflies had alighted on them, so profusely are the furze covered with deep yellow and bright blossoms, while in the back ground the dark hills lifted their broad and rounded shoulders to the sky, and in the distance arose a quiet wood as yet but thinly clad in its ancient livery of Spring-green.—It seemed also somehow more in keeping with the sober England of the present day,—a fitting amusement for those innocent children as they threaded their way over the quiet and ancient footpaths, carrying to the inhabitants of lonely and out-of-the-way houses, and still green, pastoral villages, pleasing remembrances of the old observance of May, quietly reminding

them that the month of birds and flowers had returned again, and that the sweet songsters had winged their way, far, far over the stormy sea, to warble once more in the dim shady woods, over which still arch the blue and sunny skies that make so pleasant our English Springs. For poetical as the customs of our old May-games may appear in print, they were accompanied by scenes of rude, drunken, and boisterous revelry, which would but ill accord with our better regulated notions of decorum in the present day; for we should find but little pleasure in gazing upon a noisy group of men and women, throwing themselves into all kinds of grotesque and ridiculous attitudes, as with loud whoop and holla, they hand in hand whirled round the tall may-pole to the music of some old blind fiddler, or the drone of some drowsy bagpipe. Such scenes are only pleasant when youth become the actors, when the laugh and shout rise and ring from the happy hearts of the young; and the grave and matured eye looks with a quiet smile upon their merriment—for such antics but lessen the respect which is due to the wisdom of years, when the actors themselves are men and women.

Our time was a later day than the first of May for setting out a-maying, when we frequently arose long before sunrise, and sallied out into the woods to cut down the green oaken branches, which we carried home and hung over the windows, and placed above the doorways, as our forefathers had done, until we gave to the whole town a green, wild, and woodland look. Our musical instruments were bullocks' and cows' horns, with the tips sawn off, which we blew with puffed cheeks until our lips were sore again through blowing. Wherever the largest branch of oak was hung out, there were the greatest number of boys sure to be assembled, blowing away, until they were almost black in the face, on their hideous and unmusical horns. We covered our hats with leaves of oak; and, in the centre of the broad branches which hung over the doorways, were suspended garlands of flowers. Many a bough was found

afterwards, a little distance from the wood, too large for our united strength to carry away, so left behind, like many a memento of over-reaching ambition, to tell, by its ruin, how weak was the puny arm which attempted to grasp more than it had the power to retain. This rural holiday was called "Oak-apple Day," and held on the twenty-ninth of May, in memory of the escape and restoration of Charles the Second, who, when pursued by a portion of that army which afterwards dethroned and beheaded his father Charles the First, eluded his pursuers by climbing a large oak-tree, and concealing himself amid its branches—all of which you will find recorded in the "History of England;" and you will also see that it is dangerous, even for a king, to encroach upon the liberties and rights of his subjects; and that, through over-stepping the boundaries which the laws of England had confined him within, Charles the First lost both his crown and his head, and Oliver Cromwell, a country gentleman, scarcely known before these stirring times, became at last the Protector of England, and all but entitled the king.

Another of the favourite places which we were fond of visiting in Spring, was a little cottage that stood in the centre of that old wood: you never saw such a wild romantic place in your life as this was; and I can tell you that it would have puzzled you to have found it, unless you had been acquainted with the windings and turnings which went in and out of the underwood, or had chanced to come upon the only wide path that led to it, and opened out into a number of fields, all the gates of which were locked, and where nobody went, saving when we used to wander over them, or the old man had to come across with his little cart, which he very rarely did. All round this little homestead was a land of trees; for the wood was at least four miles long, by three broad, and this wild forest-farm stood nearly in the centre of it. It seemed so strange to see a corn-field standing there, and a little green pasture, where the

grey pony and the white cow quietly grazed together; while before the door of the house stretched the beautiful garden, with its row of bee-hives; and behind it, lay the old orchard; the blossoms of the fruit trees, in Spring, looking as if they formed a portion of the wood. And all around this little enclosure, rose a high, closely-woven fence, formed of withered furze-bushes; their thick stems and prickly thorns, so matted and massed together, that even the very rabbits were compelled to burrow under-ground to get at the garden within; so impenetrable was that closely-formed barrier of furze-bushes. Then it seemed so unlike any other place in the day-time, with the bright sunlight shining there, while all around the wood looked so green and gloomy, and seemed ever to sleep amid the quiet of its undisturbed shadows. It appeared like coming upon one of those peaceful settlements, which we read of in the old American forests; so solemn, and quiet, and tranquil, and out of the world did it lay, that you would scarcely have been surprised if half-a-dozen dusky Indians had leaped over the fence out of the deep underwood, and stood before you with their war-hatchets in their hands. Then the little beds of flowers had such a strange appearance there; they looked so clean, and out-of-place, so unlike the primroses, and violets, and lilies-of-the-valley, which grew outside the barrier, and which we had to grope for in dark dingles and mossy dells, beneath trailing brambles and shady hazels, and prickly thorns, and young ferns, that were just opening their fan-like leaves and huge-armed gorse bushes, whose summits were yellow as gold; for there, was no trace there of the trees which had been cleared away; and we often fancied that it had in former days been one of those open enclosures in which the Ancient Britons dwelt, when they erected their huts in the deep solitudes of the old forests. Beautiful did that old thatched roof look, covered with every variety of creeping plant; while the smoke from the thickly ivy-covered chimney went curling upward to the

calm blue sky, that seemed to hang over, and bend there more beautifully than anywhere beside; as if it loved to look down upon such a sweet and peaceful spot. And we often asked the old man what sounds he heard at night; for to us all around looked like an enchanted land. And he told us how he used to hear in the deep midnight the fox bark, and the raven croak, and the owl hoot from its hollow home, in the decayed old oak; and how on stormy nights the tall trees rocked and roared; and that he had lived there for half a century, yet never once felt afraid. He had his dog, and his cat, and his favourite raven; a goat or two that bleated after him wherever he went; and when we saw him marching forth, with his long gun over his shoulder, we thought of Robinson Crusoe, in the desert island; for, although he was not surrounded by the sea, there ever stretched about him a great ocean of trees. All the walls of his little outhouses were built of furze-bushes, and thatched with the long reed-like grass that grew among the under wood, and which nobody, saving himself, had ever cut down. And, oh! what numbers of birds built in them, and there brought forth their young; he could not go to and fro without seeing the old ones seated upon their nests; he could have put out his hand and touched them, yet they seldom flew off, but seemed to know that with him they were safe. Then he had two great guns over the mantel-piece, and a brace of pistols in his bed-room, and a huge savage dog, whose kennel was a hogshead; and this dog went ranging round the house at night, with a long chain round his neck, and would, if any one had approached the place after dark, have flown at him, and torn him down in a moment; but, although so savage at night, yet in the day-time he would come out and wag his tail, and lick our hands, seeming to say, as well as he could, "I am quite delighted to see you!" Many a pleasant ramble had we to visit that little farm-house in the wood, where we were always welcome guests; for that old

man delighted in the society of well-behaved boys, and taught us many things, which we should never have known, about the habits of birds, and stoats, and weasels, and all those curious things which you will know more of when you have read through these volumes.

Many a journey had we in the early mornings of Spring, ere the sun had yet gilded the green summits of Somerby Wood, and while the dew lay, grey and unshaken, upon the untrodden grass, to gather worms in the moist meadows beside the Trent, with which to bait our hooks when we angled in the river. Oh, what numbers of calm deep places did we know at the corners of jetties, and in bendings between the banks, places into which the strong currents never flowed, where the wild, boiling, and ever-rippling eddies came not,—spots which lay like silver mirrors, into which the tufted reeds and tall willows were ever looking at their clear, unruffled shadows below. Happy and peaceful were the hours which we passed there, anxiously watching the float as it stood motionless in the calm water, until we saw it slightly move, just as some fish was timidly nibbling at the bait, ere we knew what addition there was in store to our



GROUP OF FISHES.

What a pleasant suspense it was ; for we could not tell whether it would be a prickly perch, or a roach, or a bream ; nor how large it might be, nor what it would weigh, until, becoming more emboldened, it seized firmly hold of the hook, drew the float clean under the water ; and, then, if our line was strong enough, one good, sharp jerk was sure to make us secure of our prey, and in another minute it was laid upon the bright, green grass, a rich increase to our stock. True, it often grieved me to see the beautiful little white creatures, with their silver scales, gasping and tossing about upon the greensward, instead of gliding rapidly through their own bright element ; but long custom had reconciled us to such sights, and many, amongst the kindest hearted of men, have been anglers. Sometimes we left our angling-rods to fish for themselves, while we went to gather flowers, or sought a



SHELTER FROM THE RAIN,

like the angler we have copied from an engraving by Bewick ; and which almost makes you feel as if you were getting wet through while looking at it, so heavily does the low sky rain. Then, higher up the river, we had the osier-holt to

THE OLD BRIDGE.

visit, and the osier-peelers to watch while they stripped the tall, white, tapering willow-wands; for osier-peeling was a merry time, and drew together the poor inhabitants from many a surrounding village, to this early in-gathering of Spring. Then there was a solemn and ancient spot higher up the river, where an old bridge was said to have stood ages ago, even so far back as the time of the ancient Britons, and over it Julius Cæsar and his Roman soldiers were said to have passed, though no traces of it were visible, saving a few huge stones, which were only half-bared when the water was very low. And near this spot I loved to sit and angle, for it called up the deeds of other days which had glided away for ever; and such thoughts as then passed through my mind I shall endeavour to make you acquainted with, in a little poem which I wrote on the spot, many long years ago, and entitled—

THE OLD BRIDGE.

Oft, when a boy, I wandered forth alone,
By a broad river far from any town;
And on a bank with willows overgrown,
In that still solitude would lie me down;
The tide left a long landmark brown and clear,
And, save a lonely heron, no living thing was near.

'T was a wild spot! for there, old legends say,
In ancient days a rude stone bridge had stood,
And that two thousand years had passed away
Since first its arches spanned the rapid flood;
And there, they say, the Roman troops passed o'er,
And drove the ancient Britons from the opposing shore.

And huge gigantic blocks, all quaintly wrought,
When the tide ebbs, are seen to lie around;
And battle-weapons rude, with which they fought,
In the deep river-bed are often found;
Bucklers, and bows, and blades, and dead men's bones,
Lie heaped, as in a grave, beneath those mighty stones.

SPRING.

And I have lain upon that ancient bank,
While deeds of other days rose on my eye :
The curlew streamed above the willows dank,
Roused by the Roman cohorts that swept by,
And gilded galleys through the white waves tore,
Their purple sails outspread, the Imperial Cæsar bore.

Then that old bridge heaved up before my sight,
The architecture rude which it displayed ;
Such weapons as were used in savage fight,
And wild wolves' heads, such as in forests strayed ;
While, o'er each arch, fixed with a stony frown,
Grim-bearded Druids' heads ever looked sternly down.

And o'er it, hurrying legions burst away,
Their warlike music rising on the breeze,
Till all was lost, saving the gusty sway
Of some broad banner swelling 'mid the trees,
Or sun-bright Roman eagle, half-revealed,
Passing a British town, then, by the wood concealed.

Where the wild forest stretched along the hill,
Above the bank scooped into sandy caves,
Stood the old Druids, and with voices shrill,
Sent their loud curses o'er the murmuring waves,
And as their long, white beards streamed in the blast,
On the dark oaken groves their eyes were ever cast.

In the green vale, naked and undismayed,
Ready for fight, the stalwart Britons stood,
With bow, and club, and flinty spear arrayed,
Their scythe-wheeled chariots stretched along a wood :
Before them a rude granite altar rose
Its grey and stony front facing the arméd foes.

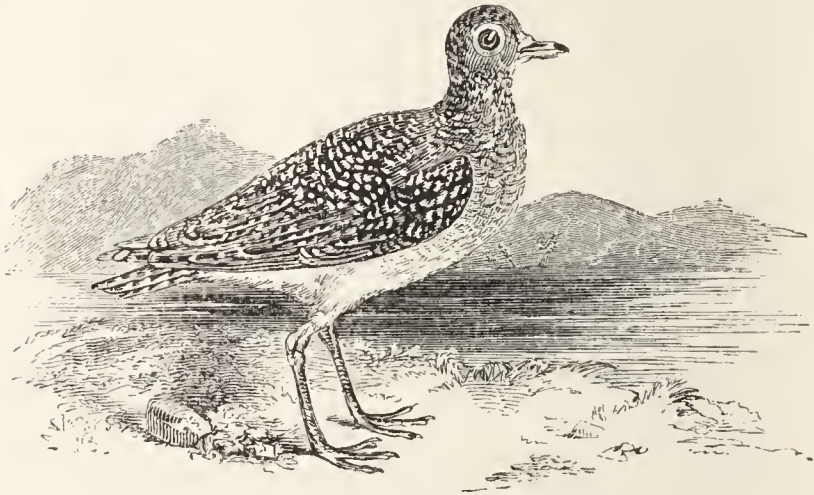
And on that fight, looked anxious eyes of love,
Peeping in fear the forest trees between ;
Wild, though they were, as untamed woodland dove,
Still there was grace and beauty in their mien ;
And as the battle closed, they shrieked and sighed,
Or sent their heathen prayers across that river wide.

It might be all a dream ; but oh ! to me
 Such fancies brought a melancholy joy ;
 And still that river flows on murmuringly,
 Clear as it did when I sat there a boy :
 And those grey stones and willows are the same
 As when a dreaming boy an angler I became.

An early acquaintance with English History stored my boyish mind with endless ideas that gave me pleasure, and made me feel as if I was never alone. I could at any moment call up the great actors, who have rendered themselves so famous in the annals of our country. Caractacus, and Boadicea, had each, in my "mind's eye," an individual form. I beheld the one, stern, unbending, and undaunted, as when he stood before the Roman Emperor, a captive, and in chains. I heard the sweet voice of the other come floating upon the breeze, soft and low, yet earnest and eloquent, as when she stood up in her war-chariot, her weeping daughters, with their faces buried in their hands, seated at her feet, while she, tall and queen-like, with her long yellow hair unbound, proclaimed her wrongs to the assembled Britons, and although a woman, showed them it was nobler to die than become the slaves of their insolent invaders. I could call up the very image of the Great Alfred before me, with his grave, thoughtful, intellectual countenance, as he stood when first defeated by the misbelieving Danes, when he wandered forth homeless, crownless, and sceptreless, and was driven by hunger and danger to seek food and shelter in the swineherd's hut. I was familiar with the very armour which the Norman Conqueror wore : I had in fancy heard the tramp of his heavy cavalry as they came thundering along the opposite bank : had seen the air darkened with arrows, and beheld the blaze of many a Saxon village reddening the deepening sunset ; and so I stood, peeping through the barred gates which time had closed upon the past, and looking upon the grey ruins which lay scattered and overturned in those

SPRING.

dim twilight walks, until armed forms again sprang up instinct with life, battlemented castles, and deep dungeons that went yawning down beneath the waters of the moat—all the rude barbarism of the past, the pomp and cruelty of chivalry, rose before me, and I felt thankful that early reading had made my memory so rich a storehouse for the past. And in these sequestered haunts I often met with the



GOLDEN PLOVER,

a beautiful, large-eyed bird, which built its nest on the ground in those wild sedgy marshes, where no doubt the same species had built long before that ancient period I have written about. Oh! what a noise would a colony of those plovers make when they were once startled! You would have thought that some great school had broken loose if you had but have heard them, such a whelping and wailing did they kick up! Then it was a great treat to see the young ones, such little downy things, running after the old plovers to search for worms; and oh, my eye! when they laid hold of one, wasn't it soon gobbled up! and though they couldn't fly, didn't they lead us a chase! for they could run like lamplighters. And they were such fellows to skulk too, and when once they had concealed themselves, there they would lie as mute as mice. Rare fun had we in chasing the golden plover

THE OLD SLUICE GATES.

A famous spot was that for Swallows too, about which I have told you so much in my "Autumn Book." They used to come there before I ever saw them anywhere else, and go in and out of the sluice gates, which opened into the river, as if they loved the gloomy shadow of the arch; and I remember once swimming under and seeing several of their nests there, which there was no getting at, as you may readily imagine; for where could we plant our feet, with a deep, rapid current below, and a dark shadowy arch above? dark, at least, unless when the sunshine shone through it. And it required a boy to have some courage to swim under there, for it contained such large eels; and great long-jawed pikes were ever swimming in and out: and if a little swallow happened to tumble out of its nest, it was swallowed up in an instant. I well remember that it was reckoned a daring deed to swim under that arch, and come out of the sluice gates which faced the river, for the dark water seemed ever to boil, and to look black and angry as if it would like to drown you for venturing into it; and it would but have only been poor consolation to have had one's death-chant sung by the



SWALLOWS.

But I will leave all such melancholy subjects, and tell you about an odd kind of character, who lived in a little village where one of my aunts resided, and who was known by the name of "Never-sweat-a hair." He never allowed any thing to put him out of the way ; and it used to be his boast, that he never once was in a hurry during the whole course of his life. Nothing ever seemed to annoy him. Things which other people would have regretted, and talked about for days after, appeared to have no effect upon him ; and when his prime fat pig died, just as he was on the eve of killing it, instead of murmuring, he said, it was a good job it was n't one of the cows : and when he once fell down and broke his arm, and was stopped by a friend to sympathize over his misfortune, he only replied, that it would have been a much worse job if he had broken his neck. The cottage, he once lived in, chanced to take fire, and was burnt to the ground ; all the neighbours, together with his wife, were busy in endeavouring to save what they could ; until, at length, there was an outcry that Never-sweat-a-hair was missing. Search was made for him, and he was found seated upon a stone-heap, at some distance, busily employed with his claspknife, and eating his way through a large lump of cold bacon and bread. All he had saved, or attempted to rescue from the fire, being a basketful of provisions. And when remonstrated with, his only answer was, that good victuals once lost could never be recovered again : as for houses, and tables, and chairs, they were intended to be destroyed, for bricklayers, and cabinet-makers, and joiners must live. After the fire, he was kindly taken in by a neighbour, who cheerfully resigned his bed, and sat up the remainder of the night. Next evening, about nine o'clock, Never-sweat-a-hair was missing. No one could tell where he had gone to. It was strange he did not come in, as his wife was waiting for him to accompany her to the new lodgings she had taken in the village. Ten o'clock came, and the neighbour remarked, " he is in no hurry, as

usual." And after waiting half an hour longer, the wife set out to go by herself. The friend who had been kind enough to give Never-sweat-a-hair shelter on the night that he was burnt out, sat up until after eleven before he retired; and when he got up stairs he was never more surprised than to find Never-sweat-a-hair in bed, and comfortably asleep. After arousing him, and telling him how long his wife had been waiting, he arose reluctantly, and having indulged in three or four gapes and half a dozen stretches, as if occupying his bed was of no more consequence than having sat down in one of his chairs, he said, "Well then I must be moving if that's it. I hope you're not in a hurry. I never am. I must sleep somewhere; and so long as there's no hurry, it does n't matter to me where it is." It used to be his boast, that he had escaped more accidents through never having been in a hurry, than twenty people ever had through running away and endeavouring to avoid them. "I remember a bull," said he, "that tossed half a dozen people who scampered off; but I was in no hurry for my turn, so took my station behind a gas-post; and when he came full butt at me, he struck the gas-post instead of me, knocking himself down with the force of the blow. He was in no hurry to get up again, and I thought it very wise of him, as I walked away." One day, the front of an old house chanced to fall in while he was passing, and there was a man before him who ran to get out of the way, and was knocked down by a beam falling; while Never-sweat-a-hair stood beside the ruins uninjured, and said, "If he had n't been in a hurry he would have escaped as well as I did." He chanced once to be crossing the river in the ferry-boat, which was very old, when a restive young horse, being also a passenger, happened to strike its hoof through the bottom of the boat, which, through decay, began to fill instantly. The ferryman leaped overboard, and had a very narrow escape of his life. Never-sweat-a-hair stood up to his knees in water, and saw it gradually increase, inch by inch, as it

was driven by the current on the shore, which when it touched it filled and went down. He turned half round, and saw the ferryman pulling himself out of the river, at some distance higher up, by the willows, and said, "If he had but waited like me he would have saved himself that ducking." He used to say, that Danger always ran straight forward, and that those who were before it only gave it encouragement to follow. That people who walk in the middle of the road on a windy day, to avoid a falling chimney-pot, choose the very spot where it is likeliest to fall, if it is a narrow street. "I keep close to the wall, and am never in a hurry, and it is sure enough to keep clear off my head. There never was a great discovery," he said, "made through any one being in a hurry, in the world. They were all easy, patient men," he contended, "and he would bet a bunch of turnips to a leg of mutton, providing both parties, if they lost, should club the articles together, and have a dinner after, that, if it could be proved, these great men never sweat a hair in their lives." He used to argue that what was a misfortune to one was a blessing to another; and that once he was on board of a steamboat which chanced to run aground, and while others were deploring the delay, he was thankful for it, for it just allowed him time to go home, without being hurried, to fetch something he had left behind. He always carried an umbrella with him in fair weather, for he said he could not bear to be hurried in case it rained. If he went into a house, and people made an excuse for not offering him a cup of tea, because the kettle had not yet boiled, of course, he was never in a hurry, and could always wait. Excuses were of no avail where he came. He knew by heart every verse of the "Proverbs," where it says, "there is a time for every thing." He called railways the road to ruin; as he declared nothing could succeed that ever went so rapid; and he believed that the disease in potatoes arose from guano; for how can we expect any thing good he said, that is grown so quick. He used to keep a tor-

toise, for he considered it one of the wisest animals in creation. "It did every thing so leisurely" he said, "and was a month in making up its mind before it moved at all." He looked upon the snail also as displaying great wisdom, and said that if every body who paid a visit to their relations had the same forethought, and carried their house with them, they would generally meet with a much warmer reception. He was never known to buy but one plant in his life, and that was an American Aloe, because he had heard it was a hundred years before it flowered ; and said that although he should 'nt live to see it, he knew it would be very handsome when it blowed, and there was no hurry. He was a great admirer of big trees, and said, they took their time over what they did. And on his mantelpiece he had a large collection of hard hollow stones : and he delighted in talking about the hundreds of years it had taken the water, as it fell drop by drop, to wear away and form one of those cavities. He valued his watch all the more because it always went too slow, for he said he felt doubly impressed how rapid was the flight of Time ; and how useless it was to attempt to overtake him. Man, he argued, was originally intended to go slowly ; and, as a proof of it, instanced how long a child was learning to walk by itself, compared with other objects, many of whom could run when they were only a few days old.

He called a backward season a fine slow Spring, and said that things would be all the better for it. When he heard that a raven lived a hundred years, he bought one immediately ; and he said that was a fact worth proving ; he was in no hurry, but he should see. He loved to watch a heavily-laden stage wagon creeping slowly along with its four horses, and always rode in them in preference to stage coaches, because, he said they were slow and sure. To show the many advantages which a man gained through not being in a hurry, he used to tell an anecdote of a farmer who, while sipping his pea-soup, took a five-pound note out of his pocket-book to get it changed, so that he might

not lose a moment, the instant he had swallowed his dinner, in starting off for home. The note fell into the soup, and as he snatched it up to shake off what had adhered to it under the table, the dog which was lying at his feet, thinking that its master was going to give it a taste of his dinner, as usual, made a snatch at the note, which, having been steeped in the soup, could in no wise be disagreeable, and swallowed it in an instant. In vain did the farmer lift up the dog by the tail, as if to make him disgorge it: it was gone, and there was an end of it. Now, argued Never-sweat-a-hair, such a loss could never have happened to a man unless he had been in a hurry. I should never have thought about changing till I'd finished my dinner. In the second place, had such a misfortune befallen me, I should have wiped the note clean first. Thirdly, I should have got up and sat by the fire until it had dried. And, fourthly, I should never have made a practice of feeding the dog until I had finished my own dinner. And so he would go on, endeavouring to prove that the farmer only lost his note through being in a hurry. He once went ten miles to see a castle which had outstood a twelvemonth's siege; and often said he should like to have known that governor, for he was sure he was a man who did nothing in a hurry. He often said that he should like to live in one of the pyramids of Egypt, for that would be a house where a man would not have much trouble with repairs. He selected his wife, he said, because she employed five minutes in scraping a thin cheese-crust the first time he saw her; and he felt confident that she would never be one to do any thing in a hurry. The sunshiny side of the way, he said, was only made for men like himself, who enjoyed it; and that only people with contented hearts were to be found there. On the shady side, he said, every body seems in a bustle; but I like to be among people who never sweat a hair. He was, of course, a great admirer of cattle shows; for he used to argue, that no creature could ever get fat unless it

was of a happy disposition. They cannot be in a hurry if they would, he used to say. And he thought that it was a good slow progress in testing the strength of leather, to see how much a hide would stand distending, without giving way, while the animal was alive; and he was delighted with the pig that made three attempts to open its eyes, and could not; and had he sat as judge, he declared that he should have awarded to its owner a prize. He often told the well-known story of the boy, who, when asked by the sportsman if he had seen a hare run that way, answered, "A hare, sir?" "Yes, yes," exclaimed the impatient sportsman, "a hare." "Had it long ears, sir?" inquired the boy. "Yes, yes, long ears," was the hurried answer. "And a short tail, sir?" the boy further asked. "And a short tail," answered the man, losing both his temper and the hare through the delay. "And when it ran did it go lobberty lob, lobberty lob?" proceeded the boy, with the coolest indifference. "Yes, yes; that's it," replied the man, more snappishly than ever. "Which way did it run?" "I don't know," answered the lad, without ever changing his countenance, "for I have not seen it." Now, said he, that was a sensible lad: he examined every part of the question carefully, and took time to consider, for he was in no hurry; and, depend upon it, if he were to live until he was ninety he would never sweat a hair. He had a volume full of scraps, containing anecdotes of persons who had narrow escapes through being too late. And he often talked about the man, who, when told by his doctor that smoking was a slow poison, said, that was why he still continued it, for he had already been a smoker above fifty years. What a contrast was there between Never-sweat-a-hair and Flying Jemmy, as we used to call a tall thin man, who was "all legs and wings," and whom, to look at, you would have thought a strong gust of wind would blow round the corner! What jokes used to pass between these two whenever they met! "Well, Tortoise," the Shadow used to exclaim, "haven't you walked yourself to

sleep yet?" "You'll be so thin soon," answered Never-sweat, "that it'll take two men to see you; and you were in such a hurry yesterday that your shadow had fairly to run to keep up to you. You go so quick," continued the easy one, "that even your thoughts cannot keep up with you; and you outstrip them so far, that you are often compelled to return home two or three times to inquire again what business you were going about." "And you are so long making up your mind about a thing," answered Flying Jemmy, "that by the time you have made it up, it is too late. As when you were about purchasing Paul Proctor's cow, and were so long hesitating, that before you had completed the bargain the poor thing died." "Hey, hey," Never-sweat would reply, "and through not being in a hurry I saved my ten pounds." The Flyer never looked before him in dirty weather, and went through all kinds of puddles. Never-sweat seldom took a step without first examining the ground he trod upon. His garden was unlike any other person's; for when their things were going out of season, his were coming in: and this he considered another great advantage acquired through not being in a hurry. He never was on a jury but once, and then he brought his nightcap; for although the rest were unanimous in returning a verdict of "guilty" ere the trial was half ended, as the thief had been captured within a few yards of the spot where the robbery was committed, and the stolen property found upon his person, yet Never-sweat was not to be hurried: he would hear all that could be said on the subject, nor could he be persuaded to give his decision at all until after a long sleep; and when he awoke he apologized for sleeping, and said he hoped he had not hurried them. They used to tell a tale about a poor man who once fell into a deep pond, where he stuck up to the middle in mud, and up to the chin in water; and seeing Never-sweat-a-hair crawling by, the poor fellow called to him for assistance. Never-sweat sat down upon the bank,

and very leisurely began to unlace his boots ; and when the poor man begged of him to make haste, as he felt himself sinking deeper, Never-sweat answered, “ Would you have me break a new boot-lace ? Stop a bit, till I ’ve undone the knot : do n’t be in a hurry.” The man extricated himself as well as he could, and when he got out shoved Never-sweat in, exclaiming, “ Although they say you never sweat a hair in your life, I wo’n’t leave ’em to say you never wet a hair.” This ducking did Never-sweat a deal of good ; and it was noticed that he quickened his pace from that day, and began to think there were occasions sometimes when a person ought to be in a hurry. When any body asked Never-sweat to do a thing he did not like, he used to say it was “ as bad as leaving off work, to go and saw deals ;” meaning it was worse than what he was then doing, for sawing deals is no joke I can tell you ; though all my knowledge about sawing is see-saw, a game we often played near a saw pit which was dug on the common, and for which game we had only to borrow a plank, and place it across the rounded stem of one of the trees, plenty of which lay about, and commence the amusement called



Rare fun was it to keep riding up-and-down on that large, long plank, on which two of us were seated, one at each end ; and very often, when our wooden horse was not properly balanced, down it would slip, at the heaviest end, leaving the boy opposite perched up a good height in the air, until a more equal adjustment of "pudding," as we called it, was made ; and when the plank was once more properly parted, away we went, as regularly as the upper beam which you see on board a steamer, in the engine-room. And beside being excellent amusement, it was also capital exercise, and very healthy too—not that we were ever much troubled with ill-health, saving when we caught a cold now and then, through sitting in some draught while in a violent perspiration, which is about one of the worst things any boy can ever do to injure a good constitution.

Oh, what old-fashioned sports I used to see in the country at Whitsuntide, at the wakes, and village feasts. Sometimes a long pole was erected, at the top of which was placed a new hat, and he who could climb up, and fetch it down, obtained the prize. Then the pole was so smooth, and made so slippery with soft soap and grease, that it was impossible to keep hold of it with the hands, or climb many yards without sliding down again ; and sometimes two and three were clambering up at a time, and when he who was uppermost chanced to slip, down he came, and down came those who were beneath him ; and rare fun it was to see them all lay, laughing and scrambling upon the ground. Then some took up their pockets full of sand, and dry dirt, and saw-dust, so as to make the pole rough, and rub off the grease, that they might retain a firmer hold ; and often, after a dozen had tried without succeeding, up would go some little fellow, after all the slippery substance had been rubbed off, fresh as a lark, and come sliding down triumphantly with the prize on his head. Then there were races with men who trundled wheelbarrows before them blindfolded, and jumped in sacks which were fastened tightly about their necks, and who,

when they tumbled down, were unable to get up again. It was so laughable to see half-a-dozen sacks with a man's head, and nothing more, peeping out of each; and when one happened to stumble against the other, down they both came, and could neither get up nor out until they were released; and sometimes they were left there a good while to kick, and holla, and storm, while the bystanders only looked on and laughed, and refused to release them until they grew more civil. Then the men who were blindfolded, with the wheelbarrows, run foul of each other, and tumbled into hedges and ditches, and went every way but the one which led to the winning-place; for some called out, "more to the right," others, "more to the left," one, "this side," and another, "that side," until souse one of them would come into a stagnant ditch, or head over heels in a horse-pond, much to the annoyance of themselves, and greatly to the amusement of the lookers-on. Then there was a pig to be caught, with his tail greased, on the wide, open common; and one was generally selected that was as thin as a half-penny herring, and could run like a greyhound, while his long tail was smooth and slippery as glass; and the moment he was laid hold of, his greasy tail slipped out of the hand, and away he went with a grunt and a squeal, and was half way over the common before the man who had tumbled down was enabled to get up again; for sometimes the pig would head the chase for a full hour without being caught, very often escaping all his pursuers, and reaching home again; and when this was the case they had only their labour for their reward. But the most laughable part of all these Whitsuntide games, was, when they ate hot hasty pudding for a wager—the victor being he who first emptied his dish. Oh, you should have seen them when they commenced, for it was turned out of the pan into the basons boiling hot! How one blowed, and another grinned, and a third kept taking a little bit from round the edges, while a fourth swallowed so hot a mouthful that it fetched the tears into his eyes, when instead of

being pitied for the pain he endured, he was laughed at for his folly : and, perhaps, some little fellow who had got into a corner, and to all appearance kept only licking his spoon, had quietly worked his way to the bottom ere the others were aware, by skimming off the top carefully, and scarcely ever losing a moment without swallowing a portion ; and so, while the other competitors were blowing, and stirring, and scarcely making any progress, he was quietly finishing his mess, and to the astonishment of all turned up his empty basin, and won the prize. Then came the donkey-race—oh, such racing ! one would n't start at all, in spite of all the pushing and shoving behind ; another would set off quite a contrary way to that he was wished to go : a third, would very leisurely down with his head and up with his heels, and lay his rider sprawling upon the earth a yard or two off ; while a fourth, perhaps, finding that there was no other means of getting rid of his jockey, would treat him to a roll upon the road ; and it would sometimes so happen that the one which did little more than the whole length at a full trot would come in and win the race, which was generally for a new saddle and bridle. Rude as these sports were, they were such as our forefathers had loved to look upon ; and as the betting rarely went beyond a quart or two of ale, or a glass of grog, such wagers could do but little injury to any one. If they were vices, they belonged to the most innocent class, and were much more harmless than those gentlemanly ones of carding, dicing, and betting enormous sums at fashionable race-courses, which I hope none of you will ever be guilty of doing.

It is not every boy who knows what a downright common village school is, such a one as I have before me at this moment, standing as it does at the end of a large straggling hamlet, and in the neighbourhood of five or six smaller villages, the remotest of which do not lay more than three or four miles from the centre one in which the school is stationed. And from all these surrounding hamlets, and solitary farm-

houses, and straggling cottages, do the boys come ; some from over the hills, and some through the woods, and others across the far-off green and pleasant fields, bringing their dinners with them in little baskets, and dropping into the school, one after another, at all kinds of odd and irregular hours ; for how is it possible to resist the many pleasing temptations they meet with by the way ? In they come in smock-frocks, and heavy-nailed ankle-boots, with hats and caps crushed into all manner of forms through climbing up trees, and poking into hedges ; while their chubby cheeks are either red as an apple-blossom, or, through exposure to the sun, almost the colour of a ripe hazelnut. Clever lads are they all at finding out a bird's nest, hunting a water-rat, or a water-hen, chasing a stoat or a weasel, running young hares or rabbits almost off their legs ; but as to learning any thing beside, you never saw such dunces as many of them are. It took them days and days of practice to make straight strokes, and pothooks, and round O's, for their round O's had often three corners, sometimes more ; their straight strokes were not unlike a dog's hinder leg ; and as for their hooks they went up and down, a little to the right and a little to the left, and were so entangled and twisted, and ran one into the other, that, for the life of you, you could not tell where they begun nor where they ended. In their sums, they made two and two five, they carried one to four, and made seven of it easily ; took six from nine and left any thing behind you please from thirteen to thirty ; carried one to eight and made fifteen of it like "winking ;" made three-and-sixpence out of sixty pence ; and in casting up twelve pounds of butter, at a shilling and a halfpenny a pound, they were pretty sure to come near double the same number of shillings, either under or over. X and Z they made vowels of, and turned E and O into consonants ; they found a plural in a single pen, but a score was with them singular. They pronounced antique, "antikew ;" and fatigue, "fatigew ;" and no, "Noah : " spelt command, "kumhand ;"

and in their knowledge of geography made Grand Cairo in Cornwall; and believed America to be situated somewhere in Argyleshire; Ireland and the East Indies they said joined each other; and Africa was with them a market-town, where they sold large ostriches' eggs. They tore up their books to make paper boats of, and swam them as they went home in the streams they passed. They held their pens as a housemaid does a poker; and when they had blotted their copybooks all over, so as to leave no space to write, they finished by blacking each other's faces with the remainder of the ink. They broke up their slates to play at "pitch and toss" with; and after the schoolmaster had whacked them, till his arm fairly ached again, they sat down upon the forms as if nothing at all had happened and said they "didn't care." If, to punish them, he withheld their dinners until they went home, by keeping back the basket in which their provisions were stored, and they could by any chance get outside the door, they rioted to excess upon a raw turnip, and banqueted like an emperor on beetroot, and fairly licked their lips over a green cabbage. If they could but get hold of the cane, with which they had been beaten, they cut it up into small pieces to smoke; they got astride the forms when their master's back was turned, made them rear up, and played at horses; they made the most awful noises, then pretended to look innocently round as if they wondered who had done it. They stowed away young birds in their hats, and, instead of attending to their lessons, imitated the chirping of the birds; and if an opportunity presented itself, without being discovered, they put on the clock that they might leave all the earlier, and told all kinds of stories about their parents wanting them to go errands, that they might get out of school the sooner. They never cared to mount a donkey unless he was a well-known kicker; would not tell their name for a dike, unless there was a chance of some half-dozen of them getting up to their middle in leaping it, and were always practising at

those fences which were the most renowned for grazing shins. There was scarcely a tree, however difficult it might be, but what they could clamber up; no garden-hedge so thick but what they contrived to get through it; nor no pinfold in the neighbourhood but what they could get the stray shaggy pony out of, if they once set about it. They could run like greyhounds, throw a stone to within an inch or two of the object they aimed at, and when they had done wrong hide themselves in such holes and corners as you would only think a rat would ever dream of getting into.

Sometimes they managed to arrive at school just in time to see the better behaved scholars leaving, and now and then they never got there at all. Occasionally, too, they had to wait outside an hour or more before they could get in, as the master had gone to measure some land for a farmer, or to see how many feet of timber there were in a tree which had just been felled. For his ideas of education extended no further than in the belief that to read a chapter in the testament without making above a dozen mistakes; to write a good, staring, round hand, which all who run might read; and to cast up and divide an account, to within a shilling or two of the true amount, was to turn out a pretty decent sort of a scholar. And it was his boast that many a boy could, by careful spelling, make out the farmer's name, which was painted on the front of the wagon, who, but for him, would never have known "a B from a bull's foot." When he could not get them to learn as he wished, he invariably thrashed them: if this did not succeed, he starved them: when this would not answer, he kept them so late that it was often dark by the time they reached home. As to teaching them, he never thought of that, there were the books, and copies and slates, and there was he, ready to thrash, starve, and keep them, if they would not say their lessons, and write their copies. He had his little garden to attend to, and farmers This-that-and-the-other to chat with whenever they rode past;

and if, when he came in again, he found the boys fighting hand over head, why he also fought too, and, as he said, “contrived to let them see who was master.” To induce them to become good boys, he promised that they should weed his garden, or gather a few barrow-loads of manure on the roads, for his little paddock; and it was wonderful how quiet they would remain for five minutes or so, whenever he offered them such pleasant promises. Sometimes he went out with them to play at Hounds and Hare, he himself taking the part of the hare; and after him they went, over hedge and ditch, for he was all legs and wings, and they pulled at his coat-laps, got him down and pretended to worry him, forgiving him all the thrashings he had given them, and never caring or bestowing a thought about those they were likely enough to receive the very next day. He argued, that beating them well caused them to grow, and that keeping back their dinners would prepare them for being good farmers, and enable them better to endure the many hours which they would have to labour in the fields without food. He made them dibble and set his potatoes, as he said, to instruct them in agriculture; cut grass by the road-side for his pony, so that they might have an idea of doing something “when they went out to place;” and gather acorns for his hogs in autumn, to instruct them a little in getting in harvest. He sent them on errands five or six miles off, to the market-town, and although they sometimes lost the money, or brought soap for sugar, tin-tacks for tea, and candles instead of coffee, he only beat them, and sent them back again the next day; for he argued, that a long walk and a good whacking were two of the finest things in the world to improve the memory.

He had only been elected schoolmaster, by the neighbouring farmers, because he excelled all the other candidates in his answers about how many loads of manure there would be in a dunghill of such a size, and how many square yards in a field of given dimensions. He read a paragraph from the newspa-

per which laid upon the table, did a sum in subtraction, which one of the farmers set him, wrote his name in small hand, and then in large, and was elected by a majority of three. Such was the schoolmaster, and such were his pupils; nor was there one amongst them all who had a greater objection to a long hard word than himself. Still he was at the bottom a good-hearted man, he knew that the race he had to deal with would be sent out to sow and plough, and tend cattle, and not one out of ten would ever, perhaps, take up any thing but a song, to get off, after they left school, or write on a barn-door, with chalk, how much their wages came to in a month, at ten pounds a year. Nor is my picture at all overdrawn, for sorry I am to say, that many such schoolmasters and scholars, are yet to be found in those out of-the-way and obscure villages, which are scattered up and down England, even in the present day. Nor is there, perhaps, much exaggeration in the description, which some of you may have heard, of a village schoolmistress and her scholars, who when they could not very clearly remember even their letters, some such dialogue as the following took place:—Schoolmistress: “What letter’s that, Billy?” Billy: “Don’t know.” “What’s that farmer Jobson feeds his horses with, Billy?” “Straw,” answers Billy at a venture, “No, hay,” replies his enlightened instructress. “Remember it’s hay, Billy,” “Now what letter’s that, Billy?” inquires she, proceeding again. “Don’t know,” answers the chubby-faced pupil, counting the marbles in his pocket, and looking upon the ground. “What’s that which flies about in the garden with a sting in its tail, Billy?” “A wasp,” answers Billy, his thoughts wandering to the sunny bank, and the hole at which he has watched them go in and out so often. “No, Billy; a bee, Billy,” replies the dame, exulting again in her superior knowledge. “Remember a bee, Billy; and B E spells bee; and a bee makes honey, Billy; and h-u-n-n-double-e spells honey, Billy. Now, Billy, what’s the next letter? I know you know that.” “Crooked S,”

answers Billy at a venture. "No it is n't," answers she; "try again." "Then it's round O" replies he, quite positive this time. "No it's not: what do I do with my eyes, Billy?" "Squint," says the young vagabond, telling the truth at last, and grinning from ear to ear. "Squint, do I? you young dog!" she answers, fetching him a bat on the head with the book, and scattering all the loose leaves upon the floor. "It's C, you ignorant little jackass you, C-E; and I'll make you see before I've done with you, that I will, for saying I squint." And up she jumps and chases Billy, with the book-cover in her hand, round the room, and over the forms, and in and out between the scholars, until at last she probably tumbles all her length upon the floor; while her hopeful pupil runs, screaming and laughing, out of the door, followed by the whole string of scholars; and such is the end of Billy's lesson for that day. And all such pupils would do to improve themselves after they left school would be, to cut out some queer hieroglyphics, which they called the initials of their names, either upon a gate-post, or the church-spout; while their reading would be confined to spelling out the names on the shop-signs; and by a great effort they would perhaps be enabled to count twenty backwards without making a mistake. What think you to such a school as this, my boys?

I will now endeavour to describe to you the life which a country-boy leads, whose parents are very poor. He is scarcely out of his mother's arms above a few years, before he has to nurse some great fat baby of a brother or sister, half as big as himself, while his father and mother go out to work in the fields; and this great chubby-cheeked "babby" he carries with him into the lanes, and fields, and on the commons, and he sets it down anywhere, while he hunts in the hedges for nests; and sometimes the little thing will, when it grows big enough to crawl, as if anxious to gather all the flowers at once, throw itself down, spread out its little legs and arms to their fullest extent, and crow again with delight, while its innocent

face is buried amongst the flowers, delighted to think that they are all his own, if it chooses to gather them. When he grows up, he goes to gather fuel in the woods or lanes; tends the cows for somebody, and has perhaps a shilling a week for it. If he does this, his whole day is spent in the pleasant green lanes,—for all he has to do is to see that they do not get into the fields, or run away, or trespass anywhere, and get into the pinfold. How he amuses himself I can hardly tell you. Sometimes he runs after the birds, tries to make traps to catch them, chases bees and butterflies, plaits rushes together and makes himself a dunce's cap, jumps a bit, runs a bit, whistles a bit, has a nap if he likes, opens the gate for some horseman who may happen to pass, and fairly crows again if the traveller should by chance throw him a halfpenny; and depend upon it, his thoughts are fully occupied for all the remainder of that day, by thinking of what he shall buy with it; but the first and last thought is the little confectioner's shop, and there it goes. The very first thing he purchases, when he is rich enough, is a knife, and he spends hours in sharpening it on a stone; then he cuts gate-posts, and sticks, and branches of may-blossoms off with it; and it is never out of his hand for the first week or two, only when he is asleep. If he can only get out "to place," he is happy; for he has often heard what lumps of fat bacon, and great hunches of brown bread, and huge porringers of new milk, and mugs of home-brewed beer, boys get who live in the large farmhouses; and he longs for the time when he shall get his victuals for his labour, and his parents will only have to find him his clothes. That time at length comes, and oh! isn't he busy then! he has the pigs and the poultry to feed, and he goes out into the fields in the early part of Spring with a great fork over his shoulder, and knocks the manure about, to get a good appetite for his dinner. And he has to run all the errands,—to the mill about the corn, and to the blacksmith with something he can hardly carry to mend; but above all,



WATERING THE CATTLE

is what delights him most, because he can ride both there and back to the clear bright “beck ;” for such is the name given to a sheet of water that runs across a road in the country, though I cannot tell you why it is so called. Oh, you should but see him sitting astride of one of the broad-backed horses, and driving the cattle before him ! he is some proud I can tell you ; and when he has had a little more practice, he is intrusted with the horse all the way to the mill, to bring home a sack of flour on its back. Then if the land is heavy, he drives the horses for the ploughman, carries a long whip over his shoulder, and cries “gee-hooe-gee” like a man. He now wears heavy ankle-boots, and a blue or white smock-frock, a round cart-hat, and lifts up his smock-frock to put his knife into his waistcoat-pocket just like the head-mán, John ; and thinks that the day will perhaps come when he shall have a watch of his own, like him ; then wo’n’t he pull it out about every five minutes or so to see what o’clock it is ? He can now weed, and

plant potatoes, and bush-harrow, that is, drive the horse up and down the field, that drags an old gate behind it filled with thorns, to raise and lighten the grass, and level and break up the mould. But, oh! I cannot tell you one-half of the things he does; though I must not forget one great event in his life, and that is when he is first trusted with a gun, and allowed to shoot at the sparrows and rooks in the corn-field. If he cannot hit them, he can the gate somewhere; and perhaps after a many tries he happens to send one single small shot into his hat: ah! you should but see him show his companions the hole;—but then the old gun is pretty sure to send its shot somewhere, for when it comes out of the worn-out old barrel, it spreads about nearly the space of half-a-dozen yards. When he gets money enough, he gives five shillings for a “real” beaver hat, to wear on a Sunday; and to show you that it really is beaver, he brushes the nap up the wrong way, so that every body may see what a lot of beaver there is on it. The next thing he purchases is a shaggy plush waistcoat, either a red or yellow one, covered with black spots: if yellow, he believes it to be made of a leopard’s skin. He now carries a stick, and takes a delight in standing and talking to men, especially if any body of consequence happens to be passing; and if he sees any youngsters in the fields trespassing who are a year or so his juniors, he calls out, “Will you boys get off there?” and if they happen to run away directly, he thinks himself somebody at once. He makes friends with the old shepherd-dog, and bribes it with lumps of bacon and pieces of bread to follow him; and if it only steps a yard or two aside, and any body is by, he calls out, “Come here, sirrah,” to let them see that he has something to do with it,—for he wishes people to think that he is a man all but “a little bit.” Is n’t he proud if any great farmer passes him and says, “How are you, Jack?” or “Do you think we shall have any wet?” Oh, does n’t he look up, and, if he chances to say, “I think, Mr. Jobbins, we shall

have a little rain," he wishes heartily that it may rain, so as to give the farmer a high opinion of his "weather-wisdom."

And now I think I have given you an insight into all his little vanities, for when he begins to talk to Betty I have done with him; and if he buys her a ribbon when he goes to market, why, depend upon it he means "sweet-hearting;" and then let any lad call him a boy after that if he dare, for he would turn round and say, "Where do you find your men?" Remember, I have given him no schooling; and there are many like him who, saving a few hours on the sabbath, never had time to go to school, nor ever knew any thing about the world, beyond the neighbouring market-town, which they visit once or twice a year, perhaps, and the village in which they were born. Gray, in his beautiful "Elegy," which I hope all of you have read, has summed up such a life in a few lines, where he says,

"Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
 Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
 How jocund did they drive their team afield;
 How bowed the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

"Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
 Their homely joys, and destiny obscure!
 Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
 The short and simple annals of the poor."

The world may never even hear of their names; yet they have done their day's work, their duty to their fellow-men: and without such as these, who were once poor country-boys, our fields would remain uncultivated, and our harvest unreaped. So here I end with an old English sentiment, often the motto on a village alehouse sign, and say, "God speed the Plough."

There was a curious character who used to wander about amongst the villages, and whom I could never look upon, when a boy, without a mingled feeling of wonder and awe, and that was

the country Rat-catcher. He was a thin man, with a face the colour of a walnut, with sharp, dark little eyes that were deeply set in his head, and a long chin that seemed to project out as far as his nose, while his forehead went sloping back, and his cheeks were nearly covered with short brown hair; and I never looked at him without being struck by the resemblance he bore to an old rat. He looked like a rat, he smelt like a rat, and when he was in a hurry he went jumping on like an old rat that had got two stiff legs. From head to heel he was all over rats: he wore a great, long, cotton-velvet coat, full of strange pockets from top to bottom, every one of which buttoned over; and this coat was fairly alive with rats. Put his hand wherever he would, inside or out, into any one of those mysterious pockets, and out came a great long-tailed, black-eyed rat. He wore a belt over his shoulder, that went under the opposite arm, and nearly reached down to his knee, and this was covered all over with figures of gilded rats. His glazed hat was also surrounded with them; his purse and tobacco-pouch were made of the dried skins of rats; there was one carved on the lid of his snuff-box, and even his tobacco-stopper was a rat's foot mounted with silver. He pulled them out of his pockets, and allowed them to run about him, up his arms, and on his shoulders, and round his neck, and in and out of his great velvet coat they went squeaking; and out of his pockets they sometimes sat, peeping like swallows from the holes in their nests. He had names for them all—such funny names: "Short-tail," and "Round-ears," and "Black-nose," and "Bob-with-his-eye-out," and "Nock-the-nailer," and "Tommy Licktrencher," and "Dicky-in-the-dumps," and "Jacky-my-love;" and they all seemed to know their names: and when he called them, Short-tail, who had lost two or three inches of his hinder appendage, would poke out his head; and the one whose ears he had cut would make his appearance; then out would come the next, whose nose looked as if it had been blacked with ink; he was

followed by old Bob, who had only got one eye, and who always looked as if he were asleep; then came Nock-the-nailer, so called because he was always knocking about in the pocket, and never at rest; he was put away and succeeded by Tommy Licktrencher, who was ever hungry; then came Dicky-in-the-dumps, a sulky dog, whose tail he was compelled to pull to make him move at all; then Jacky-my-love, the greatest favourite in the lot, who was ever trying to get at the old man's long chin, as he said to kiss him, though we often thought to ourselves that he had a most villanous look, and contemplated giving him a good bite. And sometimes the old rat-catcher would get into the large tap-room of the village public-house, and by clambering up the horseblock, and looking in at the window, we could see him turn out his whole family of rats at once, and hold them to the very noses of his rough wire-haired terriers, who never attempted to touch them, although they would have nipped up and worried any strange rat that they had chanced to come near, in the twinkling of an eye. Then he had ferrets, too, such long-bodied, white-haired, strange-looking animals, with eyes as red as rubies; and although they would have laid hold of your finger, and drawn blood in a moment, yet they allowed him to handle them, and play with them; for he had tamed them to such a degree that with him they seemed playful as kittens: and with his ferrets and terriers he went about from farmhouse to farmhouse, earning his livelihood by the destruction of rats. And no sooner did he put one of these ferrets into a corn-rick, or a hole in the barn, than out the rats would come, rushing one after the other, and there stood the terriers ready to worry them in an instant; and in this manner two or three score were destroyed in the space of an hour or two. Mr. Jesse, in his "Gleanings," a work full of interesting anecdotes relating to the habits of animals, speaking of the destructive nature of the rat, says, that when a proposition was made for removing a horse slaughter-house to a greater distance

from Paris, the great objection made to such a removal was a fear of the ravages they would make in the neighbourhood, when they had no longer the carcasses of the slaughtered horses to feed upon; as many as thirty horses, or more, were sometimes slaughtered in a day, and nothing but their bare bones found next morning, all picked clean by the rats. In one of these slaughter-houses, which was enclosed by solid walls, the carcasses of two or three horses were placed, and in the night the workmen blocked up all the holes through which the rats went in and out as they pleased; when this was done, the workmen went inside, with lighted torches and heavy sticks, and in one night killed 2,650 rats: in four such hunts the numbers destroyed were above 9,000. They made themselves burrows in the surrounding neighbourhood like rabbits, and to such an extent were these excavations carried, that the earth sometimes fell in, and revealed the immense subterraneous works which they had made. They also multiplied so rapidly that there was not room for them to lodge in the slaughter-houses, and paths could be distinctly traced in the fields over which they came to feed in the night, and returned in the morning.

There is scarcely a village in England without a little shop in it, where you see over the doorway, in strange-looking letters, "Licensed Dealer in Tea, Coffee, Tobacco and Snuff, Pepper and Vinegar," where they keep every thing well-seasoned, and very little that is fresh. You cannot mistake it, for there are generally a lot of little children looking in, licking their lips, and seeming to envy the very sunshine which is melting the lollipops in the glass jars; wishing that they were small as flies to hop about and eat up the dirty handful of sugar that is thrown in one corner of the window; and fairly longing to have a suck of the two or three wizened oranges, which have lain undisturbed for weeks on their little bed of comfortable dust in the corner. There is generally a hair broom, a mop, and a besom at the

door, and an empty tea-chest which the carrier brought, and which, when full, contained a dozen sixpenny fire-shovels, a dozen pieces of hearthstone, ditto of Bath bricks, and the same number of lumps of pipeclay, with divers and sundry packages of red ochre. They never lay in a stock of more than a pound of tea at a time, which the carrier brings to them in his coat-pocket; and were any little girl to come for a whole ounce, they would send her back again to see if it was not a mistake, so accustomed are they to serve out only half and quarter of ounces. They make halfpennyworths of sugar, and seldom give a child a pennyworth of treacle in a teacup, without a caution not to put his finger in and lick it as he goes home; for if he does, it will be short weight when he gets there. They are never without gingerbread cakes, plum buns, and biscuits; but as they are all mixed together in one drawer, it frequently takes some time to find such as are wanted, and when found, scarcely any thing less than a good heavy hammer will break them; nor is there the remotest chance of eating them at all, until they have had a good soaking in a basin of water. The top row of the window is generally dedicated to a few whipping and pegging tops in a net; half-a-dozen shuttlecocks stuck in one another; a couple of halfpenny battledores to match; a spotted harlequin suspended by the neck, who kicks up his legs and arms beautifully when the string behind is pulled; a wax-doll, whose nose and lips the sun has melted away; a wooden dog that used to squeak when it was moved, before it fell down and got broken; two or three soldiers on horseback lying higgledy-piggledy together, some of the men without heads, and some of the horses without legs; and two or three halfpenny kites, with a beautiful cross in the middle, marked with red ochre; with one or two other articles, such as a sixpenny fiddle without strings, the bow of which has long since been lost—and these make up what the village shopkeeper calls his toy department. The second row is dedicated to a very small show of crockeryware: a

few little packages which are either groats, oatmeal, or lucifer matches, you cannot tell which, unless you go close and read the labels; beside these, stand two or three bottles of patent medicines, those intended for the use of the villagers being the smallest, those for the cows and horses a little larger. Next stand a couple of pens, a box full of wafers, and a little bottle which once contained ink. These are matched by half-a-dozen pipes, very tastefully crossed and tied together; then a bill, about something which was stolen, lost, or strayed, you cannot tell how long ago, for the date has slipped down. This is accompanied by another bill, announcing "Day and Martin's Blacking,"—not that they ever had any, for they found it come cheaper to make their own; but as the pane happened to be out, and it just fitted, it came in very handy, and the glazier lived above five miles off. This completes row the second, with the exception of a written paper, announcing "A Cotage too Lett Inkwire within." The bottom row it is almost impossible to describe, for it is made up of soap, and soda, and stone-blue; a pair or two of boots, ditto of shoes, a hat, and a little suit of corduroys; parcels which are supposed to contain every thing, though they have very much the appearance of bricks tied up in brown paper; a piece of bacon mounted on a lump of cheese; a half-quartern loaf, overhung by half-a-pound of candles, on both of which the effects of the hot sunshine are visible; two or three eggs which have been kept long enough, and made warm enough to contain little chickens; three onions, one of which is wizened, while the other two have begun to sprout; a mousetrap, a frying-pan, and a gridiron, with a tin saucepan, turned bottom upwards, and surmounted by a half-bladder of dirty-looking lard. These, with a notice that passengers and parcels are booked there for the Red Rover coach, make up about all you can see without a very minute examination. If you venture inside and ask for any thing, no matter what it is, they have it; but bless me! wherever can it be? it must be somewhere in one of these

drawers. John! John! John comes out of the little back parlour, he also is certain that it must be somewhere—he scratches his head, and tries to remember—has a recollection of Mrs. So-and-so having a penn’orth about six months back—knows he did it up, and put it away carefully—must be this—no, those are tin-tacks—must be that—deary me! they’re thimbles!—didn’t know they had any—and had given an order for two dozen to come by the carrier on Saturday—Could n’t you look in again in about an hour, or call next day? they should be sure to find them then. Perhaps it is a lead-pencil you want. They have black lead, but they reckon that wo’n’t do. They have pens also, but, unfortunately, at that time are out of ink;—the last ink they had a great jar tumbled off the shelf, fell on it, and broke the ink-bottle; and it was very unfortunate, for it happened all to run into the drawer where they kept the moist sugar. Is there nothing else you want? a penknife, or a pail, or a penny box of paints? You shake your head, and say no—and bid good-by to the Village Shopkeeper.

Amid the life, and stir, and animation which the return of Spring has brought with it, we must not forget the Easter Holidays, as they are the first that come since old Christmas sat warming his hands beside the hearth. There are other faces, on the rivers and roads now, looking different to those which only go to and fro on their errands of business—numbers who sally out with no other motives than to see how the country looks after the return of Spring. You know them by the holiday smile which they wear upon their faces, by their ever “babbling about green fields,” and opening flowers, and the sweet and sunshiny spots which they are on their way to visit. On the steamboats you hear their merry laugh; their conversation sounds above the shrill whistle and deep groaning of the railway-engine; it drowns the noisy clamour of the guard’s horn behind the coach; and they give back shout for shout to the noisy welcome of the village children, who are out to play

in the busy streets through which they pass. What pleasure has it afforded me, in my happy rambles into the country, when issuing from some village inn, where I have located myself for a few days, I have been attracted by the noise of merry children to peep into some green and shady corner, and have there come unaware upon a group of little fellow-travellers, while they were busied in gathering flowers, and who have, at my unexpected appearance, scampered off in all directions, leaving their floral treasures scattered about upon the ground, until I had crossed the rustic style, and was far away beyond the high hawthorn hedge, behind which they were sheltered when I first approached! And sometimes, while wandering beside a clear stream, that went winding in and out like a silver thread, between meadows which were almost knee-deep in flowers, have I startled a little company of village children, as they were swimming their boat, or, further down, seen a group of larger boys venturing timidly into the cold water, and, by the shiver they gave, telling how much they wished for the summer sun to make the stream warmer. Others, by the wayside banks, were hunting for the beautiful empty snail-shells, which were streaked and varied with endless lines of gorgeous colours, looking not unlike some strange flower that had forced itself through the covering of dead leaves. Then, another pleasant sight was the first brood of young birds, which could scarcely fly half the length of a field without resting, and seemed almost afraid of venturing anywhere away from the high-sheltering hedges and the tall green trees; little things, that would fairly shrink again if only a dragon-fly went sailing by, and even looked upon the butterfly, which they would not, ere long, hesitate to make a meal of, with an eye of wonder. And often, in those very trees where the young birds sheltered, the old withered leaves, which had stood all the batter and storm of the past Winter, still hung, dead, and dry, and brown, amid the garland of fresh green with which the coming Summer

had adorned herself—looking like old age and youth congregated together; the one about to drop into the grave, and the other revelling in the full enjoyment of the morning of life.

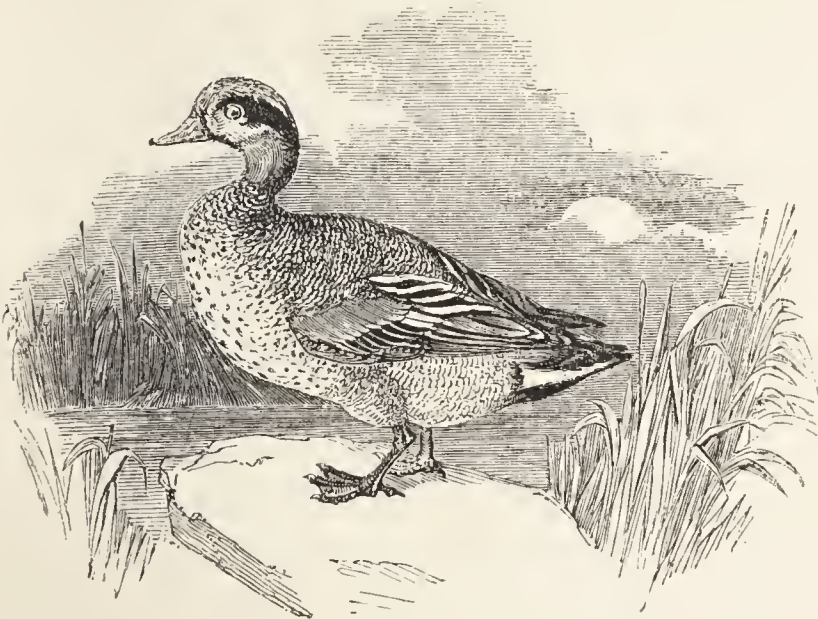
There is another curious bird which I have not yet told you about, and which, they say, took its name from Canute the Dane; for, when cooked, it formed one of his favourite dishes. It is called the



KNOT.

You all remember Canute the Dane: it was he who rebuked his flattering courtiers, when, in their fulsome adulation, they told him that every thing was possible for him to accomplish, by ordering his chair to be placed near the sea-shore while the tide was rising, and commanding the waves to retire, as he still retained his seat until they began to wash about his feet; when, turning round upon his flatterers, he said, “Confess ye now how frivolous and vain is the might of an earthly king compared to that Great Power, who rules the elements, and can say unto the ocean, ‘Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.’” Although this bird belongs to the class of sand-

pipers, it still retains its Danish name; and you will readily see the resemblance there is between the words Canute and knot, the former of which was anciently spelt knute. It is fond of frequenting marshes, and may often be seen in the neighbourhood of the sea; and sometimes, during a high tide, the rocks, in the northern parts of our island, are covered with them, and there they sit until the tide recedes, when they fly down and commence their search for food upon the beach. The knot is seldom above nine inches long, and weighs but little more than four ounces. The head, neck, back, and wings, are of a grey, ash colour; a dusky streak runs from the bill to the eye; and the wings are edged with white, varied with curved and dusky lines. It is very common, in the fens of Lincolnshire, though we have no proof that it builds in our island. Another bird, which may be found in the same locality, is the



TEAL,

the smallest of all the duck tribe, for it seldom weighs above twelve ounces, and rarely exceeds fourteen inches in length. It is, as you will see by the engraving, a beautifully marked

bird, for the bill is black, the neck and head bay, while on each side a rich green patch stretches backwards, bordered with a line of white, while the hinder part of the neck, back, and body, are finely varied with wavy lines of black and white. The other portions of its plumage being beautifully diversified with buff, brown, black, and glossy green, while the white breast is exquisitely dotted with round spots of black. Its nest, which is made of rushes, and lined with down, is generally built by the side of some pond. The eggs are about the size of those of a pigeon, and are of a dullish white colour, spotted with brown. The manner of capturing it is much the same as that which I have described in Winter, in taking the wild ducks; where a decoy is made covered with nets, and supported by hoops, all of which you will see by referring to the passage I have alluded to.

But were I to fill a whole volume, it would not contain half the interesting information I could give you about birds only: from the great eagle, that sweeps the sky with its broad wings, down to the little golden wren, which I have described, would intervene a long list of birds whose names I have not even mentioned, although I have made you acquainted with the habits of so many. And not a year elapses without naturalists making some new discovery, and adding fresh facts to the thousands which are already known respecting the habits of birds. As to insects, when I tell you that one gentleman found, within a very limited neighbourhood, and in a space of time not exceeding two months, near three thousand various species, and out of these many which he had never before seen in any collection, you will readily imagine what a wide field there is yet to explore before we are fully acquainted with this wonderful branch of natural history. The unpractised eye but sees them winging their way, or dancing in clouds in the air; the naturalist would capture them, and so arrange them in different species, that a common observer would in a moment be struck with their dissimilarity of appearance, and see at a

glance what a variety of distinct forms they present when thus classed in form and order. So it is with birds, and flowers, and even fishes, about which we know so little. There is, in every separate class, something varied and striking, and which, when rightly understood, shows how perfect is the order of creation in even the minutest forms.

What makes a country ramble so interesting is, that almost every time you go out you are sure to discover something new. If your walk extends beside a sequestered brook, there perhaps you see the water-rat swimming about, and stopping every now and then to nibble at a green leaf that keeps moving up and down, as rocked by every little ripple that passes; or some strange butterfly goes sailing away, of a different colour to any one you have ever before seen; or a flower arrests your eye, and you endeavour to learn its name. Perchance some strange-looking bird is perched upon a spray; for you are as likely to meet with one of these winged wanderers as the wisest naturalist that ever set out in quest of such strangers; and occasionally a rare bird or two visits some particular neighbourhood that is not met with anywhere else in England. In fact, it is almost impossible to wander any distance without making some fresh discovery.

All boys love Spring better than any other season of the year; for, somehow, Summer seems to sink into it so imperceptibly, that however narrowly we look we can scarcely distinguish the change; for it seems but a continuation of Spring, only covered with more green, and marked with another race of flowers. Autumn also glides in upon Summer with a noiseless motion; though, to an observant eye, all these changes appear clear and visible. But Spring rises up from the nakedness of Winter, and arrests every eye by her coming; she appears even at our doors in crowded cities, and the cry of "Sweet primroses" tells us that her flowery feet are already upon the earth. For, even without journeying into the fields,

the twitter of the swallows upon the eaves proclaim her coming; and, above all, we see her bright cheerful face in the lengthening of the days—the sunbeams that come peeping in at the window, so early in the morning, in place of the gloom and darkness which, but a few weeks ago, hung around; and we recall the many sweet country spots which that bright sunshine is warming, and the thousands of beautiful flowers it is nourishing and bringing forth,

“ In the early, early morning, when the Summer sun doth shine,
Before the red cock crows from the farm upon the hill,
When we are all asleep, and all the world is still.”

TENNYSON.

It is also pleasant to notice the trees, as they become every week more thickly covered with leaves—to trace the broader opening of the buds, day by day, until at last high over our heads hangs the dark embowered roof, covering many an undiscovered bird's-nest, and sheltering numbers of callow young, which, but for this green curtaining, would fill the maws of hungry hawks and other birds of prey. Then the great brown bees, that belong to no hive, go booming past; and ever up amid the sunlight, in the branches, we catch glimpses of beautiful insects; while butterflies, of almost every hue, go fanning their mealy wings among the under-wood, as if they had not yet made up their minds where to alight, amid such a sweet variety of flowers and twinkling of leaves. And ever there come, as if only to peep at you, the redcap, and the blackcap, and the yellow-hammer, and the white-throat, the grey-linnet, and the green-linnet, and a host of other birds, swinging for a moment at the end of some spray, where they warble a few brief notes, then dive off amongst the green branches to places only known to themselves. And you almost wonder, when you consider how far they fly away, at times, that they are ever able to find their nests again, in a great, green, old, pathless wood, where every tree seems to look

alike, and where you would soon be lost were you to venture as they do through thicket, and dingle, and deep-sunken dell, which no foot, saving that of the woodman and gamekeeper, ever traverse.

The morning skies of Spring are very beautiful, so blue and marbled, and broken into cloudy masses or groups, that are dyed with the richest colours when the sun rises. I have often fancied, as I have noticed those clustering clouds, gathering around the eastern sky, that they were humble vassals, waiting for the approach of the sun, who, when he arises from his couch, casts off his raiment of many colours, and scatters it amongst the clouds; for the sun never appears twice in the same dress—never seems to wear the same garments again; the dawn has ever a new pattern ready woven for him in her golden loom. Boys who lie late in bed cannot imagine the beautiful colours which hang about the morning skies of Spring and Summer about sunrise—cannot even dream of the splendour in which the east is robed before the round sun comes heaving up above the distant hills. No painter could ever imitate in colours, no poet describe in the most beautiful language, such magnificent skies as I have many a time witnessed at these seasons of the year—

“ Right against the eastern gate,
Where the great sun begins his state,
Robed in flames and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liveries dight;
While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o’er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.”

MILTON’S “L’ALLEGRO.”

And here we must take our farewell of Spring, and journey further onward towards the pleasant land of Summer; for many

SPRING.

a flower has already faded, and many a young bird, by this time, flown; and others there are whose song ceased when the white may-blossoms were drifted away. The little lambs have grown taller and stronger, and their weak, pitiful bleating has taken a deeper tone. There is also a darker shadow about the trees, and on the hazels you can now see where the bunchy clusters will be hung. The green corn has put on its eary plume, the feathery grass has already begun to whiten, the violets of the early Spring are dead, and, saving in moist and shady places, the pale primroses are all withered and gone. In place of those young and delicate tints, which bore such a soft and tender appearance, we now begin to see the broader and bolder opening of Summer in all her beauty; and the Season, whose cheeks were before wan with the hues of snowdrops and lilies-of-the-valley, are now becoming flushed and tinged with the deep dye of the opening roses.





SUMMER :- SHEEPWASHING.





SUMMER—HOW ANTICIPATED AT SCHOOL—DESCRIPTION OF MOWERS AT WORK—HAYMAKERS—BEAUTY OF THE HAYFIELD—WIND-ROWS—HAYCOCKS—ROLLING AMONGST THE NEW-MOWN HAY—A RURAL MEAL—LAND-RAIL, OR CORN-CRAKE, DESCRIBED—HAYMAKERS RETURNING HOME IN THE EVENING—SUMMER MORNING—RIVER-SIDE SCENERY—BOYS BATHING—THE DROWNED BOY—NECESSITY OF LEARNING TO SWIM—GOING OUT TO MEET THE HEYGRE, AND OUR BOATING EXPLOITS—THE WATER-HEN; ITS HABITS—DELIGHTS OF ANGLING—AN ADVENTURE WITH A BIG BARBEL—THE SILVER HOOK—ANGLERS REFRESHING THEMSELVES—SOME ACCOUNT OF DUCKY DENT, AND HOW HE CAUGHT A RED HERRING—THE WATER-RAT—HOW WE STORMED A WASP'S NEST, AND WHAT WE GOT FOR OUR PAINS—CURIOUS CONSTRUCTION OF THE WASP'S NEST—BEAUTY OF A SUMMER SHOWER—GREAT VARIETY OF GRASSES—BATTLE BETWEEN A BLACK ANT AND WASP—THE OLD CHAIR-BOTTOMER, AND HIS FRIEND THE TINKER—VILLAGE SCHOOL-CHILDREN—KISS IN THE RING—SOFT JEMMY, AND HOW HE WAS TAKEN IN—SHEEP-WASHING AND SHEEP-SHEARING—ABRAHAM AXBY, THE OLD SOLDIER; MY RAMBLES WITH HIM THROUGH WARTON WOOD—THE OLD FOREST LAWS—PROGRESS OF SCIENCE—WEASELS AND STOATS; HOW A HAWK CAUGHT A WEASEL, AND A WEASEL CAUGHT THE HAWK—THE DESOLATE OLD HALL—JOHN OF GAUNT AND HIS DAUGHTER—THE CUCKOO; ITS HABITS—AN ENGLISH LANDSCAPE—PEACE AND WAR—A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT—FOLLY OF FORTUNE-TELLING—BOTTLE-TITS AND THEIR NESTS—THE OTTER—LITTLE BOB, THE FISHMONGER—THE GREBE, A CURIOUS BIRD—THE OLD RIVER-BED INSECTS—CATERPILLARS AND THEIR NESTS—CADDIS-WORMS,

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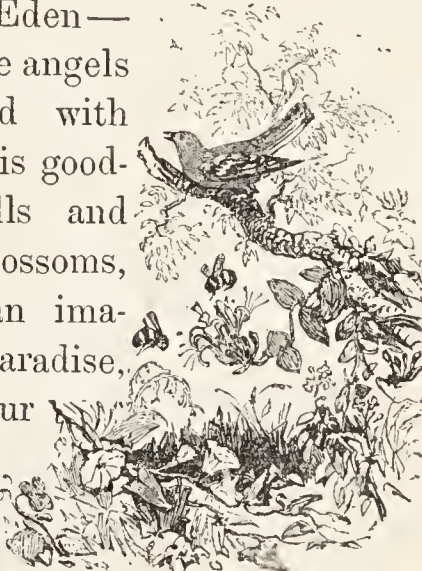


The Summer sun shines bright to-day,
The bee among the flowers doth stray,
The bird is singing on the spray,
While in the fields the new-mown hay
Throweth its fragrance every way.



SUMMER is come again, bright and beautiful as it ever cometh, for the trees and flowers never looked more lovely than they do now; and although man sinned against his Maker, and was driven from the Garden of Eden—that garden in which the angels walked, and conversed with Adam—still God, in His goodness, adorned the hills and fields, with leaves and blossoms, as beautiful as we can imagine ever waved in Paradise,

that their presence might gladden our hearts, and call forth our praise and gratitude, while looking upon the wonderful workmanship of His hands.



SUMMER.

Many a time while at school have we talked about this delicious season, often wondering if we should find the young birds hopping about the neighbourhood of the old nest, in the same green hawthorn hedge, where they had built year after year; and often have we fancied that we could hear the sheep bleating beside the brook, where they had been driven to be washed;—we imitated the shout of the glad cuckoo, and recalled the very spot where we heard her singing in the sunshine, as she stood perched upon the topmost bough of the old ash-tree. We assembled in little groups, and planned many an excursion in our minds, to places where hundreds of sweet wild flowers grew, to solitudes where the water-hen swam, and built, and dived, and reared her young; where the tall bulrushes waved, and the bending water-flags nodded to their shadows in the clear stream. Our memory flew back to the green straggling lanes, and fields that sloped down from the foot of many a rounded hill; to mornings when the world seemed bathed in sunshine, and the smell of the hawthorn mingled with the sweet breath of the cows, as we drove them homeward at milking time—or, mounted on the broad-backed horses; rode them to water in the clear pool beside the wood, before they dragged the heavy wagon into the hay-field. In fancy we saw the wide village green, where the cricketers were wont to assemble, and the bank by the river side, where we spent so many happy hours in angling; for old home-scenes and healthy pastimes seemed to arise before us with a pleasanter look, as the summer holidays drew nearer; and our hearts beat lighter as we hailed the season of birds and flowers; and forests with their rich perfume, and skies hung with blue, where clouds change from silver to purple, then become golden as they gather around the setting sun—for to us summer was ever the happiest season of the year.

Up and away, then, “my merry men all,” as Robin Hood says to his foresters in the old ballad, and we will ramble

together through the fields and woods, over many a high hill, and beside many a pleasant brook, and talk about the wonderful things which we are sure to meet with in our way. We will gaze upon the great oak which seems to grow up into the very sky, and examine the graceful form of the small cup-moss which is scattered around its twisted roots on the earth ; look upon the huge ox that lows in the meadows, and shakes the earth with its heavy tread ; and talk about the little harvest-mouse, which would not more than weigh down a farthing were it placed in the opposite scale. We will visit the spot where the fierce hawk builds its nest, and show you the home which the titmouse erects for her young ones. We will leap, and run, and shout, and sing that little woodland song of Shakspeare's, until we make the old hills echo again, as they ring back the chorus, while we merrily exclaim, from the very joyousness of our hearts,

“ Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither—come hither.”

What a “ rasp, rasp,” do those mowers make as they sharpen their scythes ! Hark ! how the sound is echoed back from yonder wood ; let us pause a moment, and watch them while they mow down the bladed and tufted grass, and all the beautiful array of wild flowers. Look how firmly each man plants his foot upon the ground ; what a regularity there is in the bending of their bodies, and the swinging of their arms—all moving like one man, step for step, stroke for stroke. By glancing down the field you may count the number of “ swathes,” which tell the width swept down, by every stroke of the scythe, from where the first cut began, to where the last sweep ended ; wave above wave does the grass lie in endless succession, as if the wind had blown the broad sur-

face of a lake into ridges, and left them heaped up without motion.

The mower has no time to pause and look at the many things which would delight us ; he takes no notice of the little mice which run squeaking everywhere, of the young birds whose nest he has laid bare and open to the sunshine, cutting down the feathered grass which closed all around it, and shut it up in green on every side, so that even the hovering hawk, as he balanced himself on his wings (although his eye is so sharp that he could almost see a single hair as it laid upon the ground), was never able, with its keen glance, to discover that nest, filled with the half-fledged young ones. He takes no notice of the flowers which at every sweep he prostrates to the ground—the golden buttercup, the silver daisy, the tufted clover, white and red, the purple vetch, the fragrant meadow-sweet, and the cuckoo-flower, are all buried together, ridge upon ridge, soon to be piled into wind-rows, heaped into hay-cocks, then thrown upon the creaking wagon, and borne away, load after load, to the rick-yard, and there preserved until the fields no longer furnish forth pasturage for the cattle.

Further on, we find the hay-makers busy at work, for there the grass was mown down a week ago ; the farmer is in the field amongst his labourers, and as he is an old acquaintance of ours, we will venture in at the open gate. Take up that fork, and toss the hay about as wide and as far as you can, no matter how high you heave it, the higher the better, so that the wind may pass through and dry it thoroughly. While you are busy here, I will take up the rake and draw closer together what was spread out yesterday to dry, and soon we shall form a long bank of hay, the whole length of the field ; and these in the country are called “ wind-rows,” piled high and light, that the wind may blow through, and the sun shine upon them—and a beautiful sight is a large field with fifty or a hundred of these rows, running in a white line from hedge to hedge, like

a sleeping sea, the green spaces between, the trough of the waves, which seem motionless, and yet to be like it the sea must be still, which it never is. Now we will take up a fork a-piece, and, commencing at the end of one of these wind-rows, roll it together, as we would a large snow-ball in winter, over and over; heavier and heavier it becomes, until it gathers into a large haycock, high as our heads; and now, after all our trouble, what say you to a somerset—head over heels, away we go, up this side and down the other; here's one of our companions already buried in the midst of it, another armful or two of hay, and not a bit of him will be seen. Warm work this, my boys; and we can scarcely proceed for laughter. Look how John shakes himself as he creeps out from the other side of the haycock, scattering the hay everywhere, like a water-spaniel that has been swimming in the river; there is no fear of our breaking any bones here, though we are all again down together. But what is this compared to loading the wagon? Just look what forkfuls the men lift up at a time—half a haycock at once, until their forms seem buried under so large a bulk. Theirs is indeed a happy life!

Hungry! ah, there is no wonder at that. Let us see what our friend the farmer has got stored up yonder at the foot of that old tree—bread and cheese and ham, and a wooden keg of excellent ale—what can we have better?—and all offered to us with a hearty welcome. But beware of the dog, for we must not proceed too near him without his master's permission; for he keeps as safe a guard over his treasures, as a sentry would over the crown jewels in the Tower of London. A word from the farmer, and the dog is friendly with us in a moment; he has done his duty, has given up his charge to his master, and he covets no more than that friendly pat of the back, which tells him plainer than language could speak, that he has been faithful to his trust. Listen! that is the voice of the



LAND-RAIL, OR CORN-CRAKE,

which I can compare to nothing else than drawing the thumb-nail sharply across the teeth of a comb, only a hundred times louder than any noise we could make on such an instrument. Country lads call it the corn-crake or meadow-crake. Were we to pursue it, it would be still in a moment; and the next time we heard it, it would be far away from the spot where it is now, for it will squat amidst the long grass motionless as a stone; and I remember seeing one whose head had been cut off by a mower's scythe, whilst it sat nestling amid the unmown grass. You rarely see it take to its wings, for it glides onwards from one spot to another, without once soaring above the waving surface of the meadow. It generally builds its nest upon the ground, and lays from twelve to twenty eggs. Its back is of a beautiful brown colour, barred with black; while the under parts are of a pale yellowish brown, almost softened into white beneath the belly, with about as much tail as some of the charity school boys in London have to their coats, that is, just enough projecting to take away the name of jacket. We have heard a score of them at a time creeking together in the rich meadow-lands which stretch beside the Trent in Lincolnshire. It is a most difficult bird to capture, and we never remember having seen one that was tame. Some say they are much

EVENING.

finer eating than a partridge, but for our part we would much rather hear their “creek, creek,” as we do now, than sit down, and make our dinner off them.

It would form a pretty picture were we to stay here until nearly sunset, and watch the



HAYMAKERS RETURNING HOME

in the evening; to see them in their rustic costumes threading their way along yonder winding road. One carrying a rake, another a hay-fork, a third with the bottle and basket swinging over his shoulder—their faces browned with the hues of health and labour; to see them drop off one by one, just where a

SUMMER.

thatched cottage appears here and there in the landscape, half hidden amid the surrounding trees. They will need no opiate to send them to rest ; the blackbird and the throstle will sing their evening hymn, and as the twilight shadows settle down into a deeper blue, the voice of the nightingale will perchance be heard chanting her “tirra-lirra” around their homesteads. In the morning, while the dew is yet hanging upon the rose, the speckled lark, starting from its slumber beside the daisy, will hymn its early matin high in the air, and pour forth a flood of song, which shall cause the awakened labourer to peep out from his lattice, half buried in woodbine, and thank God for the coming of another day which seemeth so favourable to the gathering in of the hay-harvest : for beautiful is the opening of morning, when the tall tree-tops are first gilded with the slanting sun-beams, which seem to quiver as they shine. Oh ! what a noise do the birds then make in the woods ! what a humming of insects there is in the air, and a sweet singing sound amongst the waters ! you hear the bird-boy’s whistle, and the milk-maid’s song, and catch the murmuring the bees make amongst the flowers, as they come out light, and return home laden with honey to their hives ! And many celebrated men I can tell you have not thought their time ill-spent in watching the habits of these curious insects ; they select a season for swarming, waiting even for days, when the weather is unfavourable ; and it is believed by many, that they first send out scouts to select a spot suitable for the swarm to alight upon. No sovereign rides forth with a greater train of attendants than a queen-bee ; for she has her outriders, her spies, and generals, her armed troops who hem her in every way, guarding her with watchful and jealous eyes ; and where she once alights, there the whole army settle down, until it is almost a marvel that they do not kill her with the very weight of their kindness. If not recaptured and again placed in their hives, they will often commence forming their honey-comb in

the hollow bole of a tree; and there are instances on record in which they have begun to build their cells on an open and unsheltered bough.

What a pleasant walk have we here along the banks of this cool river! and at this secluded corner, behold there are a number of



BOYS BATHING.

Unless you can swim well never venture into deep water. I well remember, when a boy, being present when one of our companions was drowned. He ventured out too far, and the current of the river carried him off his feet. Although there was no hole, nor dangerous spot where we were bathing—for a man seven feet high might have walked out foot by foot, and not lost more than two or three inches of his height in the water at a stride, so gradual and sure was the slope of the gravel bed—yet the torrent swept this poor boy off his feet, and he was drowned!

The scene rises as vividly before me as if it had but happened yesterday. I remember well it was his birthday; in

honour of which, his fond mother had allowed him to put on his Sunday clothes. It was after dinner when we went out for a walk. His mother bade us not stay very late, and invited two or three of us (his chosen playmates) to come home with him to tea. She had made a large plum-cake to celebrate his birthday, for he was their only child. I forget now who it was that first proposed we should go and bathe. It was in June; a beautiful hot sunshiny day; so instead of going to the Long Plantation a bird-nesting, as we at first intended to do, we turned off at Ashcroft Dike, passed the old oil-mill, and wandered on the banks of the river, over a field or two, until we arrived at the Gravel Bed, our favourite bathing place. We placed our clothes, as usual, carefully under the willows on the bank, one or two kindly throwing down their every-day garments, that our companion might put his Sunday clothes upon them, and so preserve them from being soiled. I was reckoned a good swimmer, and, if I remember rightly, made my way at once across the deep river. Greatly have I regretted this since, for, saving myself, there was but another amongst us who could swim, and he was close upon my heels when the alarm was given that our comrade was drowning. The river Trent, in which we were bathing, is rather wide; and as I was resting myself on the opposite bank, I did not at first clearly comprehend what had happened; for no young savages ever yelled or shouted louder at the sight of a white man, than we were wont to do whilst bathing. It was the silence which followed that alarmed me most, and I swam back again with a heavy heart; for, without being told, I knew that something had happened. On the bank the group of boys was huddled together, some crying, others silent,—all sorrowful. My companion who could swim assisted me, and we dived for him in turns, until we were compelled to lie down on the shore, breathless and exhausted, and almost black in the face through our exertions. I shall

carry the scar to my grave which marks the wound I then received, through the cap of my knee striking against a stone while searching for him at the bottom of the river. It was a melancholy picture was that scene on the banks of the Trent; and such a one I hope it will never be my lot to witness again! We looked over the water, on which the sunshine streamed, trying to fix upon the very spot where he last arose, as if we expected to see him appear once more; but the river rolled on as smoothly as if it had never closed over a human being. After waiting long, we dressed ourselves in silence, each eyeing the clothes which our companion would never wear again. Then we began to ask one another, who would undertake the painful task of carrying home the clothes of the drowned boy.

At length we divided his garments amongst us: his little waistcoat was borne by one, his jacket by another; each carried something, from his neckerchief to a single boot. We entered the town by the back way, as being less frequented; we passed the school, where he had that very morning received a reward of merit. One of us went and informed the school-master of his death. We left his clothes in the school-room, and good Parson Freedom was sent for; and he carried the sorrowful tidings to the poor drowned boy's mother. I have heard the neighbours say it was a heart-breaking scene; that she had been to the door many times to look for us; had cut up the plum-cake, and prepared the tea;—but that day none of us dared to venture near her. It was several days before the dead body of our companion was discovered, when most of his schoolfellows attended the funeral. It was the first heavy sorrow that many of us had ever felt, for he was a great favourite with us all.

Mark where that boat comes slowly along, drawn by the horse which traverses the hauling path. There is a look of mischief about the man who drives the horse. See, he has

checked its speed; the hauling-line is slack, and sweeps up the boys' clothes, who are too happy in the water to pay any attention to what is passing on the land. A smart stroke of the whip, and the rope is again on the full stretch, a perfect clothes-line—jackets, trowsers, and shirts, there they dangle; the man laughing heartily, and seeming to take no notice of the



BOYS IN PURSUIT OF THEIR CLOTHES,

as they hurry out of the river, and endeavour to regain their garments. Now a jacket is shaken off, and picked up; and after having led them a chase the whole length of a field, the driver (who pretends he is not aware of what has occurred) at last stops his horse, and restores to them the remainder of their clothes. Then commences a hunt for a lost knife, a pencil-case, or something or another, which has fallen out of their pockets while the hauling-line had possession of their garments; and those who have lost nothing, are laughing at the fun, though they are good-natured enough to assist their companions in the search.

SWIMMING.

Again I would warn you never to venture into deep water unless you can swim, or have some one with you that can, and who is ready to keep a close watch in case of an accident. Not that swimming is at all difficult to learn, if a boy has courage enough not to mind being soused head over ears a few times in safe and shallow water; but he may try to swim just as well where it is only a yard deep, as if he ventured up to the neck. Never, while learning to swim, venture into a strong current, for fear of being swept off your feet. Wade as far in at first as you can with safety; then turn, with your face towards the shore, and try to make a stroke. Any boy who can swim will be proud to show you how to strike out with the hands and feet, at the same moment of time. Once learn to draw up the knees, and throw back the legs when you launch out the arms, and open the hands to strike, and you will soon be able to swim. Corks, planks, bladders, and such-like things, are very well for the timid; but a courageous boy will sooner learn without such assistance, and will swim all the better afterwards through never having used them. Above all, remember that every boy may soon swim if he will but try.

We have said nothing about bathing as conducive to good health, beside being of itself a noble exercise. If you can swim, what a triumph it is to know that you can cross a deep river without the aid of a boat! But, oh! the proud feeling, to be conscious that you are almost as safe in the water as on land; to look at a river, and be able to say, "I neither care for your being deep nor strong; I can toss your waters aside by the strength of my arm; and, in spite of your roaring and rolling, master you. You may carry me a few yards lower down by your power; but I can get across for all that, by swimming, like a fish, with my face against the stream! Here goes for the tree opposite—hey! and back again, old river (by God's permission), in spite of your strength!"

Oh! how cool, and healthy, and lively one feels after a good swim, especially if we do not stay in the water too long! Byron was almost as proud of having swum across the Hellespont, like Leander of old, as he was of having written "Childe Harold;" nay, he boasted more of having accomplished the former feat, than he was ever known to do about the best poem he ever wrote, for it was a deed which no coward dare have ventured upon; and courage is a grand thing for either man or boy to possess, so long as they never make a foolish use of it. If Nelson never knew what fear was in his boyish days, depend upon it he was not so well acquainted with danger, as he was in his after-life.

But I have not yet told you of our



BOATING EXPLOITS,

and the dangers we often encountered when we went out to meet the tide. There are not many rivers up which the tide—or Heygre, as it is called in the country—comes; and those who never before beheld such a sight, would be struck with fear

and astonishment. Fancy yourself in a boat on a broad, calm river, in a still summer's evening, borne gently along by the current, and scarcely a ripple on the smooth surface of the water, saving what is made by the swallow as it every now and then dips down. Away you go, laughing and chatting, and leaving the boat to its own lazy motion, just gliding along as it likes past the old town, beyond the last wharf, below the white mill; away and away, between winding banks, where willows are ever waving; between sweet meadows, where flocks bleat, and herds low; leaving one village on the right hand, and another on the left, and still moving along with a kind of dreamy, idle motion, just as the water wills it, just as the boat chooses to drop down; when, hark! hush! what sound is that, which comes like the first roaring of a storm through the forest? Although it is yet above a mile off, you hear that low, sullen roar, deepening every moment as it draws closer. Louder and louder—nearer and nearer it approaches. Then you hear a distant shout of human voices; sailor calling to sailor, ship answering to ship; onward and onward the alarm is sounded, repeated by the boat above you, as you send downwards the cry of "Ware Heygre!"—which is taken up and echoed by every boat upon the river for miles away. Steady, boys! "swape" her head half round, so that her nose shall just plough the high hill of water which is coming down thundering upon us. How awful it looks!—a huge wall of water swelling within twenty feet of us, as if some huge monster, large as the hills, had suddenly risen from the deep river-bed, and that was the swell he made before heaving his gigantic and hideous head above the surface of the river! Fear not, my boys; we pardon your looking a little pale, as this is the first time you have been out on such an adventure. Steady, steady! we shall be upset if you all rush to the opposite side of the boat, and she will be turned bottom upwards in a moment. Be firm! fear not, move not!

Hold on by the “thofts” and sides as firmly as you like; but at the peril of your lives, move not! It comes! Bang! dash!—up in the air, and down with a plunge that almost makes us dizzy. Steady, round with her head—and we are off like an arrow from a bow, half filled with water, it is true, and drenched to the very skin; but ours is a good, strong, deep boat, made for the stormy sea service; and we have an old rusty saucepan at the bottom, ready to bale her out with. So, hurrah, my boys! for now we have nothing to fear. What a pace we go! By Jove, it is like dashing down the Falls of the Niagara! There never was a vessel in the world went quicker through half a mile of water, than we have done. What a grand sight! was it not? The very trees on the bank seemed to be flying in the air, so rapidly did we dart past them; and as for the houses, every window seemed to dance by in long lines of light! Oh! a pleasant place to live beside, is a noble river like the Trent, where the great black porpoises come up out of the sea to look at you, and the immense sturgeons every now and then make such a swell in the water beside your boat, that you would hardly be astonished if a whale came next, whipped out his tail and gave you a whack with it. “And dare you,” asks some young reader, “swim and bathe in such a river?” “Dare we? Ah!” we answer, “that we dare!”—and have seen little urchins in the water, seven or eight years old, “naked and undismayed,” pelting a porpoise almost as big as an elephant, and regretting they could not get near enough to drop a little salt on its tail. Caught? Ah! that they are, very often—dragged to shore, carried off in a wagon, shoved in the stable of some village inn, which lies far away from the river, and shown at a penny a head to the wondering rustics!

Observe that dark-looking bird, swimming about beneath the shadow of the sedge; it is the

WATER-HEN.



WATER-HEN,

which sometimes builds its nest so near the edge of the water, that after heavy rains it is often carried away, or buried beneath the stream. It is a wild solitary bird, selecting the most dark and gloomy spots to build in; and its nest is often occupied by the water-rat. Were a large pike to make its appearance, the water-hen would quickly hurry to her nest for shelter, for fear the pike should snap her up at a mouthful; her young ones are frequently devoured by fish, for they take to the water soon after they are hatched; and, no doubt, their being exposed to so many dangers whilst young is the cause why the species is so scarce, and so seldom seen. Observe, what a rich red there is about the base of the bill, and what a clear white it shows underneath the tail, as it dives, or turns to and fro in the shadow of the overhanging willow. Its nest has a very rugged appearance, and is composed of flags or rushes, and such aquatic weeds as grow beside the pool: the eggs, which vary from five to seven or nine in number, are of a dirty yellow colour, and look as if they were spotted with rust. I wish I could show you her young, but it is too late, unless she has built a second time—

SUMMER.

such little black downy things you never saw ; they look like so many rats sailing about in the water. We might have

wandered a long summer's day, without once meeting with this bird ; nor do I ever remember seeing more than two of them together, unless I have stumbled upon the young brood when first they have taken to the stream.

And now, my boys, I must tell you about the fine sport we had whilst



ANGLING

in the streams and sluices which fall into this beautiful river Trent. Every mile or so, as you walk on its banks, you meet

with great flood-gates, which can be opened or shut to keep the water and fish in, or to let them out at pleasure. And, as we have before said, these great water-courses, called sluices, dikes, or delfs,—which latter is an old Saxon name for a place that has been dug out,—go for miles through the wide marshes and rich pastures, and are filled with almost all kinds of fresh-water fish:—bearded barbel; red-finned roach; prickly perch; pike, with enormous jaws, and heads like crocodiles; and spotted tench, grayling and gudgeon; eels, that were wont to hide under stones, break our lines, swallow our hooks, and then escape; bleak, which we caught to bait our bottom lines with; and I cannot tell how many other kinds of fish, which were found in abundance in these pleasant inland streams. And I can tell you we were never fast for a fishing-rod, where so many beautiful willow-trees grew; but up we clomb, and cut down one which was small, and straight, and tapering; a pennyworth of strong twine from the grocer's, formed our fishing line; we made an excellent float out of an old pen and a cork; fastened our hooks, of all sizes, to the long horse hairs which we twisted with our own hands; and as for baits, we had only to go to the fell-mongers for gentles, or dig in the surrounding banks for worms. We were well acquainted with the deeps and shallows; knew, to an inch, how to adjust the float, so that we might either angle for top or bottom fish: and we have carried home many a good fry in our day. Oh! it was a pleasant life was this angling, on that beautiful river, or amid these sequestered streams; so exciting if you chanced to have a bite from a big barbel,—and I will tell you now, how a big fish once served me.

I had placed my rod upon the bank for a moment, to pick up a fish I had caught, which was dancing and jumping, and leaping, and at every spring getting nearer and nearer to the river, and would, at another bound or two, no doubt, had I not quickly have removed him, regained his

native element. Well, do you know, just as I had succeeded in throwing him a good way out, amongst the grass again, with the other fish I had caught, which lay scattered here and there and everywhere, another boy, who was angling at a little distance, but had his eye on my float at the same time, exclaimed, "Oh, there's such a bite at your line!" I turned round in time enough to see my rod swimming out in the river, for the fish was so strong that it had actually pulled the rod from off the bank. Away went the fish, with the hook in its jaws, further and further out into the river, occasionally pulling, for a moment or two, a portion of the rod under water. Along the bank we ran, watching the progress of the rod as it went floating down the current, now dragged a little on this side, then again on that, just as the fish swam and struggled with the strong hook imbedded in its jaws. There was an old-fashioned ferry-house two or three fields off, beside the river; and thitherward we hastened with all the speed we could, to get out the ferry-boat, and regain again, if possible, my fishing-rod. The honest ferryman was as worthy and good-hearted an old soul as ever broke bread, and was as much delighted with the adventure as we ourselves were; and when he saw the rod come sailing down in the sunshine, with the top bobbing at intervals under the water, he exclaimed, "By gum, that's a whacker, I'll be bound! A ten or a twelve pounder, I'll take my appyday on it!"—meaning, no doubt, affidavit. Ah! you should have seen us push out with the boat! How anxiously we watched for the rod, as it floated nearer! How the boat kept dropping down the stream! How the rod crossed first on one side, then on the other! How we stretched over the boat side! How the old ferryman stood with the boat-hook in his hand, ready to get hold of the fishing-rod as soon as he could; and how, at last, he did get hold of the rod, and said, "By gum, it is a whacker!"—and how, after a long time, and a deal of patience, we saw the

great barbel sprawling at the bottom of the ferry-boat, and banging about as if it would have driven a hole through the bottom if it could. That was the largest barbel I ever saw caught, and was more than the old ferryman and his family could eat at a meal.

Then you should have seen us after a day's angling, when getting a small willow-twigg, we twisted it, and tying a kind of knot or loop at the thick end, to prevent the fish from falling off, we thrust the smaller part through the gills, for they had all been dead a long time then, and commenced stringing them,—beginning with the larger fish first, and diminishing their size as the string became shorter, from the huge barbel at the bottom to the little bleaks at the top, “small by degrees and beautifully less.” Weren't we proud when we walked into the town or village, with such a row of fish thrown over our shoulder—twenty or thirty!—ay, even sometimes more, on the same string? Then old Uncle John used to joke us so, and anger us, and say that we had been fishing with the silver hook, which means buying the fish from other boys who had caught them. Now, you know, this was too bad when we had caught all the fish ourselves. Not but that there are plenty of boys who, through either being indifferent anglers, or having had what they call bad luck, would not hesitate, if they had the money, to buy up the fish which their poorer companions had caught, and taking them home, perhaps without exactly telling a story, would say, “See! what luck we have had to-day!” This, as we have before said, is what Uncle John called “fishing with the silver hook!”

Yet it wasn't the fish alone that we cared so much about after all; but the pleasure we enjoyed, the fresh air, the sweet sunshine, the green trees that quivered and twinkled as they overhung the water, the willows that waved, and the bulrushes and water-flags that bowed and nodded and swayed to and fro lower down beside the water's edge, and the little birds that

all day long kept flying in and out of these shady and sedgy recesses—to watch the weeds waving, and the birds, afforded us quite as much pleasure as angling. Then it was so delightful to wander home in the tranquil summer evenings, passing the haymakers and the groups of country people who had been out all day working in the fields, and sometimes to see such pretty little road-side pictures,—a young girl, perchance, milking, by the side of some green hawthorn hedge, or under the shadow of an old majestic tree, singing to herself like a bird, and making us think that there is no happier state of existence than a country life. Then a consultation was held amongst us, and all the bread we could muster was turned out, pieces that had been in our hats or pockets all day, or had lain in our handkerchiefs on the bank, and got dried in the sunshine, which we had handled with our fishy fingers, not altogether free from dirt,—all these were turned out, for every mouthful was precious now, and we bargained with the pretty milkmaid for many a dishful of her white, foamy, warm new milk, which we drank from such a clean wooden dish, white and thin, and shaped like an immense saucer. Oh! what a delicious meal that was! How sweetly did the dirty and fishy bread go down! All the dainties we ever tasted in after days can never be named beside those dirty and delicious morsels; and when we had no money, we gave her one of our largest fish—just as Izaak Walton did in his day, above two hundred years ago, when he drank a draught of red cow's milk, and chatted with pretty Maudlin and her honest mother, as he himself tells us in his delightful book on angling.

But I must now tell you a good story about Ducky Dent, who wasn't altogether so sharp as he might have been. We used to say he was born about five-and-twenty minutes too late. His fond old mother never called him anything but Ducky. Now, her Ducky, at the time we are about to bring him before

our readers, could not be a day less than forty years old ; and we used to call him a tough Ducky ! He shaved once a-week, and on a Saturday had a beard like a Billy-goat ; a little snub-nose, that cocked up like a button-topped mushroom ; a good-natured squint in both eyes, quite able, as the saying is, to look round a corner. He was also knock-kneed, and stuttered dreadfully. Had you met him in the street for the first time, you would have stopped and laughed at him with all your might ; for boys cannot help laughing sometimes, when they see such an odd countenance. He was the very image of some funny little old man, such as you see occasionally upon a jug, or stuck upon a mantel-piece ; but, as his dear old mother said, “ a better-hearted cretur was never king of England ; ” and she was right. She rushed one day into Nanny Harrison’s, her next-door neighbour, in such a pleasing pucker, that, as Nanny said, it quite did your heart good to see her, and exclaimed, “ Hey, Nanny, lass ! they say my Ducky’s soft ; but he isn’t. I’d proof o’ that to-day, when I was ironing ; for he came, and took up one o’ my hot irons, and laid it down again in a moment, without my telling him ! Now, you see, Nanny, if my Ducky had been soft, he would have kept it in his hand until it had burnt him ; and not laid it down, like a sensible lad as he is. If anybody ever says, he’s soft, Nanny, tell ’em that ; then see whether they wo’n’t say he’s sharp enough, or not ! ”

Ducky Dent was, however, a famous fisherman, and the best setter of bottom lines along the river. You know what a bottom line is—a great long strong string, with hooks fastened to it, about three or four feet apart from each other ; one end of this you fasten down with a stout peg at about low-water mark, by the river side ; then making a stone fast to the other end, you throw the stone as far out as you can into the river—line, hooks, and all, following as a matter of course, and there you leave it all night, when the tide sets in, and makes

deep water for yards above it. Next morning you go again at low water to see what there is on the hooks, for remember that they have been fishing by themselves all night long. Well, you know, one night Ducky Dent having set his bottom line, and we having watched until he went away, took up the line, fastened a large red herring to one of the hooks, and threw it in again just as he himself had before done. Fancy his astonishment next morning, when he came to take up the bottom line, and found on it a pike, an eel, and a red herring—the first red herring, as he said, he had ever caught before in his life; and it had such a funny mouth too, and smelt just like those you bought in the shops. He showed it to everybody he knew, and everybody, of course, laughed heartily; some advising him in future to bait with boiled potatoes; at all events it satisfied Ducky Dent that a salt, dried, red herring was a fresh-water fish; for, as his mother said, “he had caught it himself, and nobody could deny that!”



THE WATER-RAT

is a beautiful animal, which we often saw when angling,

and which frequents our brooks and river-sides. It is an expert swimmer and diver, and you would be delighted to see it paddling about in the water; raising its short thick head, and peering up with its small dark eyes, then nibbling off a leaf here and there, and plunging to the bottom the moment it is alarmed; for a water-rat lives entirely upon vegetables and roots, and such water plants as grow about its haunts; and all that is said about its eating fish and destroying young ducks, is untrue: a more harmless and inoffensive animal cannot be found on the banks of our rivers. Were we to examine this bank narrowly, we should no doubt discover the hole somewhere about, which leads to its nest. And you'd be astonished were you to take a long thin willow, which would bend every way, to find the immense depth to which those holes extend: but what is the most curious of all, the hole which leads to its nest is sometimes beneath the water; so that the rat has but to dive down and enter it, and, as the hole is made to ascend above the water into the bank, after having dragged his furry coat through a foot or two of water at the bottom of his hole, he soon finds himself safe enough in his nest on dry land. I remember, when we were boys, being very much puzzled about this, for we had often watched two water-rats swimming about at the foot of a bank, which was free from sedge and willows, for a considerable distance, yet, when they dived, and we had lost sight of them, they did not appear again sometimes for an hour or more; and this, I can assure you, puzzled us very much, for we knew it could not remain under water above a minute or so without coming up to breathe. As it was a dry summer, the water in the brook of course got lower every day; and when it sunk about a foot within its bed, it left bare and dry the hole which led to the nest of the water-rat, and into which we afterwards saw them enter many a time. It is very cruel to hunt and kill these beautiful and harmless little animals with dogs. I am sure a

kind-hearted boy would find much greater pleasure in watching their playful habits, as they swim about in the water, than in destroying them. Observant boys might add a great deal to our knowledge of natural history, if in their rambles they would watch more narrowly the habits of animals instead of delighting so much in killing them; for they are no doubt as happy in their way as we are in our own, and find as much pleasure in their play and recreation as the happiest group of boys who ever sallied forth to enjoy themselves in the wide range of the green fields. I should love that boy much better who would turn aside rather than tread upon a worm, than he who wilfully placed his foot upon it; for remember the great Shakspeare has told us, that the "beetle we tread upon feels as great a pang as when a giant dies." And yet, after all this sermonising, I am afraid that I was not a bit better than other boys. I will tell you why.

You see that hole in the bank? years ago I remember the encounter we had there whilst storming a wasp's nest.—It was on a Wednesday morning, before school-time, and we wanted the grubs to fish with in the afternoon, which was our half holiday: so here we came, in the broad sunshine, while the whole of the armed host were flying in and out of the hole in the bank, beating around our heads, and threatening what they would do unless we decamped. Several of us were armed with green branches, with which we beat off the dreaded scouts, who began to murmur louder and louder every moment. We had made a long tube of smouldering paper, which was filled with powdered brimstone, and all that was necessary to be done was to thrust the tube into the mouth of the nest, set fire to it, and then close up the aperture. But who dare storm such a citadel, or head such a forlorn hope, when every moment scores of wasps were issuing out ready to do battle? We had heard that wasps could not sting through a silk handkerchief, so a boy was at last found who had

courage enough to cover his head with one, and drawing on a pair of old gloves, he went boldly forward and thrust the sulphureous tube, which was lighted and handed to him, into the hole; and scarcely had the smoke begun to rise, before he came jumping off, and shrieking as if he himself was on fire. The wasps had stung through the silk, had got into his waistcoat, had surrounded us every way; not a spot was clear saving where the burning tube threw out its deathly smoke on the bank; and another lad was found bold enough, in the midst of the fight, to rush forward and thrust a large handful of wet clay on the mouth of the nest; when lo! they had another outlet, and out came the enraged host uninjured. What a battle had we then to fight; not one amongst us but was wounded; we slew scores, but still the ranks were filled up, for it was the "strongest" wasp's nest we had ever stormed. Some shrieked, some howled, others ran away, pursued by the winged enemy; some carried off the foe concealed in their dresses; eyes were soon to be closed up; lips swollen; necks and bosoms stung; hands rendered unbearable, for not one amongst our number escaped; and when we presented ourselves at the school-door, we were all ordered home, like so many soldiers who are sent after a battle to the nearest hospital. Some of us were put to bed, and the swollen places rubbed with honey; and more than one boy had his eyes sealed up, and was unable to see for a day or two: the pain we endured for a time was dreadful; nor did we after all succeed in carrying off the nest. Were we not rightly served? What right had we to attempt to burn and stifle the wasps in their nest? True, they are dangerous insects; yet they seldom sting any one unless they are first attacked, and then they can defend themselves to some purpose. Anybody who has burnt himself severely, may form a correct notion of the pain inflicted by the sting of a wasp; for although the latter is less dangerous in the end, yet it is equally painful whilst it

lasts. Their nests are very curious, and in form resemble the honey-comb, being full of cells, in which the white grubs are deposited: and you will be surprised when I tell you that they are the oldest paper-makers on record.

Réaumur states, that for twenty years, he endeavoured, without success, to discover the materials employed by wasps in forming the blue, grey, papery substance, so much used in the structure of their nests. One day, however, he saw a female wasp alight on the sash of the window; and it struck him, while watching her gnawing away the wood with her mandibles, that it was from such materials as these she formed the substance which had so long puzzled him. He saw her detach from the wood a bundle of fibres, about the tenth of an inch in length, and finer than a hair; and as she did not swallow them, but gathered them into a mass with her feet, he had no doubt but that his opinion was correct. In a short time he saw her shift to another part of the window, and carry with her the fibres which she had collected, and to which she continued to add. He then caught her, and began to examine her bundle, and found that it was neither yet moistened nor rolled into a ball, as it is always done before used by the wasp in her building. He also noticed that before detaching the fibres, she bruised them into a kind of lint with her mandibles. All this he imitated with his penknife, bruising and paring the same wood till it resembled the fibres collected by the wasp: and so he discovered how wasps manufactured their paper;—for these fibres are kneaded together into a kind of paste, and when she has formed a round ball of them, she spreads it out into a leaf, nearly as thin as tissue paper; and this she accomplishes by moving backwards, and levelling it with her mandibles, her tongue, and her teeth. And so the wasp forms paper, placing layer upon layer, fifteen or sixteen sheets deep, and thus preventing the earth from falling down into her nest.

There is nothing in Nature but what is worthy of observation ; even a summer shower, if watched with an attentive eye, is highly interesting. It comes down all at once, in large downright drops ; you may count every one within the space of a yard upon the spotted and dusty high-road ; in a pond it is truly beautiful, making such a variety of circles, as if only to break them again in an instant ; then it keeps up such a “pat, patting,” amongst the leaves—you stand under a thick leafy tree, and can hear the pleasant rattling above your head, until drop after drop comes through and begins to fall upon the ground where you shelter, and which, when all around beside seemed soaked with wet, had hitherto remained dry. And that shower had, perhaps, been drawn up by a water-spout out of some large lake, or pond : and we have before now felt a frog come thump upon our hat in a summer shower. What ! you exclaim, does it ever rain frogs ? Ay, that it does ; for as in the old game of “Take care of your heads !” “What goes up must come down.” Why you see it stands to sense, that if the water-spout has sucked up a few hundreds of frogs from some marshy lake, they are sure to come down again with a “rattle at their heels,” as the old women say, when they threaten to fetch home some truant. And oh ! what a delicious odour hangs about the air after a refreshing shower ; it seems as if the rain had called out a thousand fragrances, which had slept motionless amongst the leaves and flowers.

“Sunshine shower,
Rain for half an hour,”

used to be our song when we were boys, and wanted to get out to play ; and then, if the sun did chance to break out again, and the sky to clear up, that was the time for a walk, no matter what hour of the day it might have been.

But really there are so many curious things to be seen during a ramble in summer, that I am afraid I shall never be able to make you acquainted with a twentieth part of them ;

there is not a flower blows, however common it may appear to the eye, but what, when examined, shows such harmony and beauty in its construction, that you may, by a little study, identify it with an extensive class, all bearing a close resemblance to each other. You look over this unmown field, and nothing strikes your attention but the difference of colour amongst the wild flowers. You little dream of the beauty and variety there is amongst the grasses above, and that many of them are more exquisite in form and structure than the proudest flower that ever bloomed. Wheat is the monarch of grass, the king of all green and bladed things; and you will find his resemblance amongst a score of other grasses, the oat-grass, and the rye-grass, and many an eary-head that furnishes the birds with food. You never can mistake the species after having once noticed the straight unbranched stalk, with the narrow flag-like leaf, which starts from every knob or joint of the "straw," as if it was a portion of the stem, and which, upon examination, you will find it is, and that "peeling straws" is no impossibility: that, in the common grasses, which cattle browse upon, the more they eat the stronger the root becomes; and that in many kinds cattle leave untouched the straws that bear the seed and flower, which, when ripened, are blown out of the husk, and so left to sow themselves. But what is still more singular, those grasses, which grow on the tops of cold mountains where it is too bleak for the sun to perfect the flower, there the seed shoots up afresh from the old root, and the buds, which are formed during the winter, thus grow on independent of the new seed. We have not time now: but when we have, we will gather a handful of grass from some field, then sit down and count the different varieties which each has culled, and you will be delighted with the beautiful and silky flowers which many of them bear; nor will you ever after walk through a field without admiring the flowers of the grass.

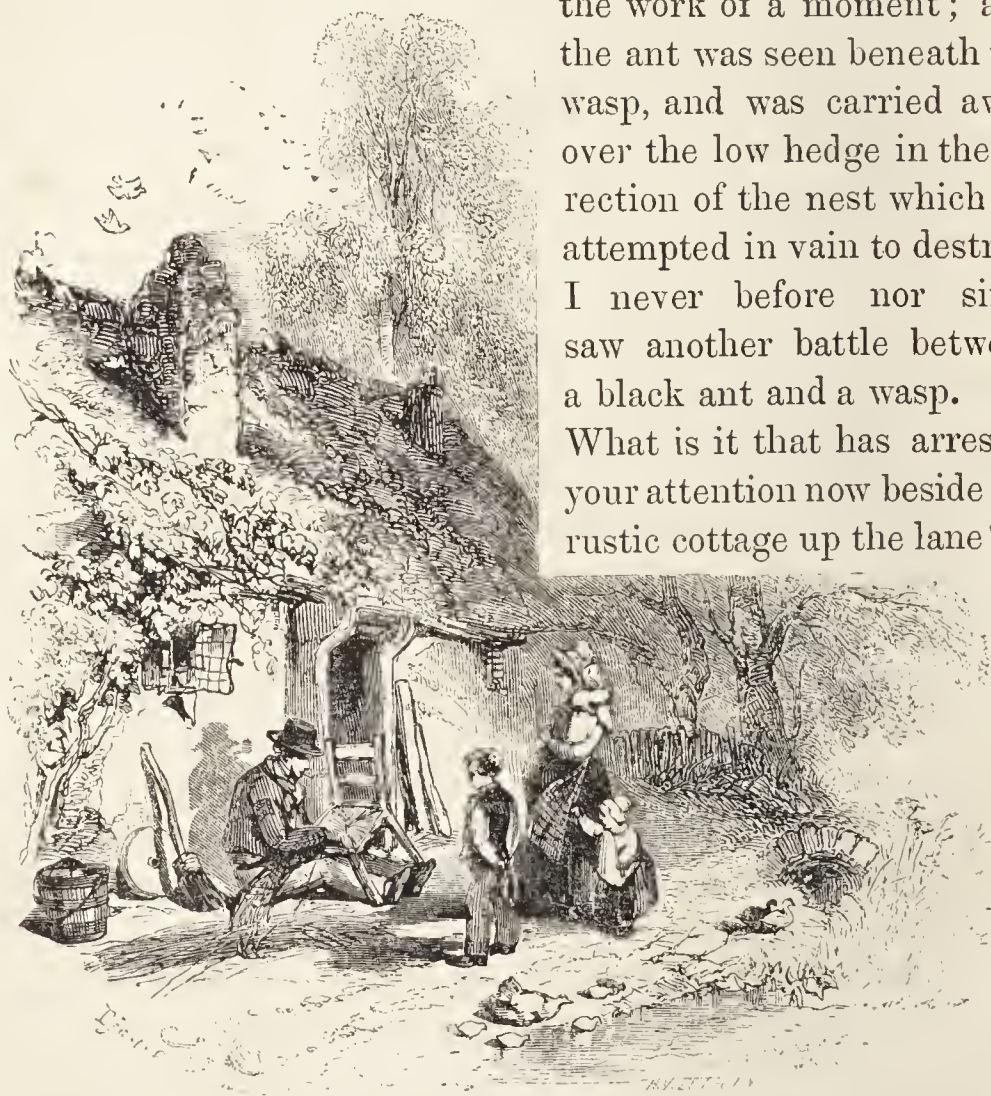
Did you ever before see the nest of the large black ant? Here's a pile, looking as if the earth all about had been rolled into little round balls. Just thrust in the end of your stick, and hundreds will rush out in a moment. Beware of their bite; it is awful! I once threw a dead mole on this very nest; and the next day it was picked so clean, that you might have fancied the bones had been polished with some instrument. I know of no method by which you could obtain such clean and perfect skeletons of birds or small animals, as leaving them for a day or so on the nest of the black ant. Look at the one here, which I have touched; how he spars at me with his legs, seeming to sit down to it. I would not place my hand for a minute on that nest for a trifle.

I was once walking by here, when something came with a loud bang against my hat. I uncovered my head to see what it was, and beheld a large wasp carrying off a black ant. I shook them off into the middle of the road. Oh, what a struggle there was between them! The ant had got hold of one of the wasp's wings, and he could not rise. You should have seen what a fast hold he kept: it was like two boys pulling at a rope, as in the game of French and English; the wasp struggled to get his wing free; then the ant pulled as if he would have dragged the wing off; and so they kept at it for several seconds, till at length the wasp began to try other means to conquer his rebellious captive. For a dozen times did he then endeavour to get the ant under him, but in vain; the ant pulled with all his strength at the end of the wing he had seized upon, and so prevented the wasp from rising. If the latter, by the aid of the one wing which was free, managed to rise a few inches, he was quickly brought down to the ground again, by the strength and weight of the ant. The struggle lasted for several minutes, and neither seemed to obtain any advantage. You would have been astonished had you but seen into what attitudes the wasp wriggled its elastic body;

still the ant kept a firm hold on the right wing, and escape seemed impossible. At last, the wasp made a desperate effort, and, expanding its one wing rose from the ground several times in rapid succession, each time bending its body into an arch, and endeavouring to get the ant undermost. The last fall seemed to have stunned its opponent. It was scarcely

the work of a moment; and the ant was seen beneath the wasp, and was carried away over the low hedge in the direction of the nest which we attempted in vain to destroy. I never before nor since saw another battle between a black ant and a wasp.

What is it that has arrested your attention now beside the rustic cottage up the lane?—



THE OLD CHAIR-BOTTOMER.

He leads a happy life enough, no doubt. You see the small rushes which he every now and then mixes with the larger ones? Those are of English growth; such we saw beside

the river, and waving above the bank where we beheld the water-hen. He can always have plenty of those for the trouble of cutting them ; the larger ones come from Holland. His is not so good a trade as it once was, for there are not so many chairs bottomed with rushes since cane seats came into fashion. Watch how nimbly and strongly he twists the rushes with his fingers ; now in this corner, then in that, plat after plat is laid down ; and every time he goes round the corner of the chair, the hole in the middle grows less. How merrily the ragged fellow whistles ! What cares he ? He carries his shop upon his back, and finds employment in every village he comes to. If he does his work well, he is sure of a glass of beer and a crust of bread and cheese. That woman keeps the village alehouse, and she has come to talk with him about mending and bottoming her chairs before the club-feast is held at her house. Rare quarters will he have there ; and you will hear him singing in the kitchen, on an evening after he has done his work, like a linnet ; and perhaps his old crony, the tinker, is at work somewhere in the neighbourhood, and will join him at night, when they will talk over the pleasant trips they have had together, the many beautiful villages they have seen in their rambles, and which is the pleasantest road to take if you wish to reach them. Wonderful things have these two happy old fellows seen in their travels ; nests, and snakes, and water-newts, and great gledes, that carried off young chickens. They have chased young foxes and hunted young hares, and taken rooks' nests from the topmost branches of many a tall elm-tree ; and when they could get no work in autumn, you never saw what quantities of brown nuts and ripe blackberries they would bring home. No two boys were ever happier than they are, when out in the country together.

But I must tell you, that when the Village Club-Feast is held at the public-house, the village school children will also have their holiday, and go to church ; and then come back to

the school-room, where they will have tea and plum-cake. Oh! how you would laugh to see those little rustics sit down to tea, many of them for the first time in their lives placed before a cup and saucer, and never having been used to anything but their brown porringer and wooden spoon, from which they ate and drank their bread and milk. Poor little fellows! they will take hold of the saucer with both hands, and blow away, with swollen cheeks, until their tea is cool enough; and bite such mouthfuls out of their great plum-cakes, that it would delight you to watch them. Then, it would amuse you to see them in the evening, playing at



KISS IN THE RING

on the village green. All the boys and girls will take hold of hands and form a ring, leaving some girl or boy outside, who will walk round and round, and at length strike some one smartly on the back; then run in and out between the uplifted

and opened arms of those who form the ring, darting across the centre, and out on the opposite side; now threading their way in a zig-zag form, then shooting across again, and baffling the pursuer, who is compelled to follow the course of the leader, who, if she is a light-built girl, will lead the rustic youth a long chase before he can win the kiss which is his reward for overtaking her; for sometimes the girls in the ring, although they leave ample room enough for their fair companion, will lower their arms, or stand closer, when her pursuer has to pass; thus giving her time to make a turning or two which he has not seen; and if he once passes through a wrong opening, he is out, and must pay a forfeit. Some are of opinion that this is the old English game which is so often made mention of in our earlier poets; and, from the passages I have met with in their writings, I have come to the same conclusion.

Country feasts, and all such-like merry-makings, are generally attended by some oddity or another; and I well remember a man called Soft Jimmy, who visited all the country wakes for miles around. He used to say, when asked where he lived, "that he was like a dog, and had his home everywhere." His residence was, I believe, in a neighbouring workhouse, from which they allowed him to go out whenever he pleased. They never could get him to work, for he was a sad, lazy fellow. If they set him to weed the garden, he was sure to pull up all the flowers, and leave the weeds; and when they spoke to him about it, he only said, "What can you expect from Soft Jimmy?" If they made him turn the grindstone, he would always turn it from the man sharpening his tools: if the grinder changed sides, so did Jimmy; he never would turn it the right way. One day he found a sixpence, and a man who saw him pick it up, said, "I've lost one." "But had yours a hole in it?" said Jimmy, looking at the sixpence in his hand. "Yes," answered the man at a

venture. "Then mine has not," said Soft Jimmy, chuckling with delight. But Jimmy was once taken in. He was too fond of cold gin-and-water, and one day asked a farmer to treat him. "If you'll go home with me," said the farmer, "I'll give you as much as you can drink, Jimmy." Soft Jimmy ran for a mile or two beside the farmer's horse; and when they reached the farm-house, the farmer called for a pail of water, into which he poured a small glass of gin, telling Jimmy, when he had finished that he should have another. "He was too sharp for me that time," said Jimmy. But Soft Jimmy took the farmer in afterwards. He was asked to run an errand, and the reward was to be as much bread and cheese as he could eat. Jimmy carried off the remainder of the cheese and the large brown loaf; saying no time was mentioned, and if he could not eat it all that day, he could the next. The good-natured farmer laughed, and, in consideration of the trick he had played him, let Jimmy off with the plunder. Poor fellow! although he but aped softness, and pretended not to be right sharp, that he might live in laziness, yet he became a senseless idiot at last, and died in the true character which he had so long assumed;—a warning which ought not to be lost upon us. Were I writing a maudlin book, I might make a long sermon on the fate of Soft Jimmy; but I trust I am writing for fine manly-hearted boys, who if they assume anything at all, it will be a character of noble manliness—a something beyond, rather than behind, their capabilities.

Pleasant, too, was sheep-washing and sheep-shearing time; such a dreamy bleating beside the brooks and about the barns, as the sheep and lambs answered each other from the wattled fences in which they were confined to keep them separate;—rare fun was it for us to pull and drag at some great, fat, heavy sheep, and drawing it towards the water's edge shove it in, and perhaps ourselves with it, while the sheep-washer stood

ready to souse the moving mass of wool head over ears. To see how he seized the sheep by the saturated wool, gave it a push, and sent it along swimming to the next washer, who, having given it a second immersion, sent it swimming onwards towards the third ; and he, after a finishing plunge, left it to find its way to its bleating and dripping companions, who, congregated together on the adjacent bank, seemed complaining to each other of the ill-usage they had undergone. Many a tug and pull have we had at those sturdy sheep, our hands oily through dragging at their hot fleeces, as we compelled them to undergo a thorough washing ; and reasoning with them in our way, as Shakspeare's Lance did to his dog, " Come along with you," we used to say, " you great, big, woolly brute ; I'm sure you must almost be sweltered to death in that close, thick, oily fleece ; surely you can't grumble at being washed once a-year, to make you clean, and sweet, and decent ; however you can stand in the summer sunshine with all that wool on you I don't know ; I'm sure if I was wrapped in such a hot, shaggy coat, such weather as this, I should swale away like a candle in an oven on baking day. Come along with you, and don't stand there making such a noise as that, you'll feel as comfortable again after you've had a ducking or two in the brook ; and as for your wool, why you'll look as if you'd got a new suit on, or eaten nothing all the summer but snow-white daisies and May blossoms."

But kind words had no effect upon them, so we were compelled to follow the example of our excellent schoolmaster, who, when he found that persuasion and forbearance wouldn't do at all, had recourse to what seldom or never failed, and that was a little rude, downright force. The washing once over, and the sheep having staid a few days just to let the wool regain its old, oily elasticity, so that, as the clippers say, they may shear all the softer, then the great summer sheep-shearing began in earnest. The huge, high, heavy, ponderous barn-doors were

taken off their hinges, and placed on strong, low tressels, or heavy logs of wood to elevate the doors to a convenient height, and on these ample tables the sun-browned shearers clipped the bleating sheep. Oh! it was famous fun to see them clipping away one against the other, and striving who could get done first—to roll up the fleeces and carry them into the barn, until we raised up quite a stack of wool—then to have a swing suspended from the great high rafters of the barn, and go such a height: ah! that was swinging indeed—then to roll all amongst the wool—to fetch the sheep up to the shearers—to turn them loose again after they were clipped, and watch how the lambs were puzzled to pick out their dams from the flock which had been shorn; you would have liked to have been there, amid all that bleating of sheep, and barking of dogs, and such racing as we had after the sheep that ran away; it was prime sport, I can tell you. But the best of all was the sheep-shearing feast—such bowls of fermenty stuffed full of currants, as you never before saw in your life, and chimes of beef seasoned with all kinds of nice herbs, which are only known to old-fashioned country people; great horns of ale, and glorious plum-puddings, almost as much as a boy could lift. Then it was so pleasant to remember that these sheep-shearing feasts are hundreds and hundreds of years old, and that we read all about them in the Holy Bible, and what Nabal's wife, who lived in Carmel, sent to King David when she kept up her sheep-shearing feast. There are many good old customs still existing in England, as we shall show before we have written all we intend to write about the four seasons of the year.

But the village feast has brought to my mind old Abraham Axby, a fine, tall, straight, silver-haired old soldier, who had fought in several engagements, and returned to his native village in his old age, to enjoy a comfortable pension. It has, I fear, been the lot of but few boys to have a companion and friend like this honourable old English soldier. Although

sixty years of age, he was as much a boy at heart as the youngest of us ; and in the summer season his greatest delight was to take some refreshment in a basket, a bottle of ale, his tinder box, pipe, and tobacco, and spend the live-long day in rambling far away from house and home, amongst the hills and woods. Many and many a day have I been his only companion. Oh, what a delicious gipsy-like kind of a life it was ! and he was acquainted with almost every tree that grew ; every wild flower, or nearly, that blowed ; knew a bird by its note, and could tell by their song whether they had young ones or not. What have we not seen in those great forest-like woods, in a summer's day ? Warton wood, which was five miles wide and seven miles long ; where we have started a polecat, that has been devouring a rabbit ; chased young foxes into their holes ; seen weasels, and snakes, and otters, by the brook ; water-rats and efts, and dark venomous vipers ; toads, so black, and such a size ; ravens with great horny beaks and owls horrible to look upon ; with hawks almost as big as eagles ; and, above all, a large tree with ten herons' nests on it. Then that old soldier was so brave, that I do not believe he would have run away, no, not if even a wolf had made its appearance. A wolf ! why he had seen wolves abroad, had heard them howl around the camp through the long dark night, which closed over the hard-fought battle-field. Oh ! what marvels he used to recount, as he sat on the root of some antique oak, smoking his pipe, and narrating his hair-breadth escapes in flood and field.

The great green solitudes of the woods seemed to have a strange charm for the brave old veteran ; he loved to hear the cooing of the ring-dove, the dreamy rustling of the long leaves, and the murmur of the woodland brook ; and sometimes I have seen him steal away, while he thought the tall underwood would conceal him from my view, and there I have noticed him, unobserved, kneeling down on the velvet moss

to pray. Since those days I have often thought, that perchance the old soldier had slain some brother-man in battle, and that his conscience had accused him of the deed, and he found it hard to reconcile his duty to his country with his duty to God, who has so solemnly forbidden the shedding of human blood. Such thoughts passed not through my mind whilst I was but a boy, but they have done many a time since then. My acquaintance with that old soldier was the means of my knowing hundreds of things, which are to be found in the country, which I might not but for him have understood. He talked, and I gladly listened; and he had at home many a good old-fashioned Herbal, and many a volume of Natural History, the plates of which he taught me to copy; thus rendering out-of-door objects familiar to my sight before I had attained my twelfth year. I knew wood-betony from the dead-nettle; could tell agrimony though I stood yards off, and knew how to make it into "tea," a common beverage even to this hour amongst country-people. Oh what bundles of herbs we used to gather! if they possessed but half the virtues attributed to them by the grey-haired veteran, mankind would have but little need of doctors. Then he was so clever at "liming" sticks for birds; could catch the old one whenever he wished, to carry it home along with the young ones: and as for moles, if he once stuck a stick and a string in the ground, next morning the "mouldi-warp," as he called it, was almost sure to be there.

Then he knew such a deal about England, hundreds of years ago, and old English forests, when they abounded with wolves, and wild boars, and great stags, which kings hunted, and Robin Hood chased; would tell me, if we had been found in those forests in former days, how we should have been outlawed and proclaimed, and dragged before the court of Eyre, and the claws cut off our dogs' feet, and even hung, if we had shot a stag which the king had proclaimed free. It was only in after days, when I had read Manwood's History of

Forest Laws, that I found all these marvellous things to be true. He told me how in that age, men were imprisoned for trespassing on the forest boundary, although there was no mark to tell them where the forest-line began nor where it ended; perhaps a mill stood here, and a mile or two further off a great oak-tree; and there was not even a footpath to tell you when you stepped within the forbidden mark, as you traversed the immense space betwixt the two objects. It seemed as if the Verdurers, or Agistors (for such names were the gamekeepers called in those days), could imprison you whenever they pleased. And right glad was I to find, in the old ballads, how Robin Hood and his merry men rose up, and, in defiance of these cruel laws, slaughtered the deer, and opposed the proud Normans, and preferred leading a wild life in the forests to eating the bread of slavery under such stern task-masters. And you would not believe how the poor were ground down, and what they had to endure and how they could find no redress for the wrongs inflicted upon them by the rich, unless you were to read some good History of England which treats of the manners and customs of that period.

Oh, what a great change has England undergone since Abraham Axby lived! Steam-boats were talked of then as wonderful things, which would go against the tide without sails, or without losing much ground. Railways were undreamed of, except the common tram-ways at the collieries, sent down an inclined plane, and drawn up by an engine stationary on the hill, and a strong rope. The market-boat, hauled by a horse, or two men, travelled at the rate of two miles and a half in the hour. To hear from America, was indeed tidings from an invisible world; while India laid far away under the sun, a burning-hot far-off country, from whence, we believed in those days, no traveller returned. But now there is scarcely a boy amongst you who has not heard of railway trains running at the rate of fifty miles an hour; of steamers crossing the Atlantic

Ocean in sixteen days; and of letters coming from India to England within the space of a month: while I, who boasted at twelve of knowing wood-betony and agrimony, should be puzzled with the first lesson a mere child, who is learning botany, masters in its earliest exercise.

And during my rambles with the old soldier, we used to see weasels, and stoats, and martens, which build their nests in holes in banks, or in the hollow places of trees; and kill hares and rabbits, catch birds, and destroy their eggs, plunder hen-roosts, and think nothing of putting a large turkey to death in an instant! Oh! they are a destructive race of little savages are these; and one has been known, before now, to attack a child in its cradle, and inflict a deep wound upon its neck, where it clung, and sucked like a leech—for they are fond of blood, and to obtain this they will sometimes destroy a whole hen-roost, not caring to feed upon the bodies of the poultry which they have killed. Some of these are red, some brown; and they are said to change their colour in the winter. They will climb trees, attack the old bird on its nest, suck the eggs, or carry off the young, for nothing seems to come amiss to them. They are also great hunters after and destroyers of mice, and their long slender bodies are well adapted to follow these destructive little animals through their runs in corn-stacks; thus rendering the farmer good service occasionally, although they never ask him to reward them with a duck or a chicken, but, whenever they see a chance, help themselves without his consent. Oh! if you could but see one attack a mouse!—just one single bite of the head, which is done in a moment, and which pierces the brain, and before you can say “Jack Robinson,” the mouse is as dead as a red-herring, for it has neither time to squeak nor struggle. It is no joke, I can tell you, to be bitten by a weasel; and if you thought, when you caught hold of him by the back, you had him safe, you would soon find your mistake out, for his neck is as pliable as india-rubber, and he would

have hold of your hand in a moment. What think you of a great sharp-beaked



HAWK POUNCING UPON A WEASEL,

and flying up with him into the air to carry him off to his nest, thinking to himself, no doubt, "I've caught you at last, my young gentleman; you've eaten many a bird in your day, but I'll eat you now." "Thank you for nothing," said the weasel as he rode, not very comfortably, between the claws of the hawk; "two can play at that game, Mr. Hawk; and if you mean feasting on me, I don't see why I shouldn't

have a taste of you ;” so he twisted round his elastic neck, poked up his pointed nose, and in he went, with his sharp teeth, right under the wings of the hawk, making such a hole in an instant that you might have thrust your finger in. The hawk tried to pick at him with his hooked beak, but it was no use, the weasel kept eating away, and licking his lips as if he enjoyed himself ; and the hawk soon came wheeling down to the ground, which he no sooner touched, than away ran the weasel, with his belly full, and not a bit the worse for the ride ; while Mr. Hawk lay there as dead as a nail. Wasn’t the biter nicely bit ! And what I’ve told you is quite true, and was witnessed by a gentleman, at Bloxworth, in Dorsetshire. Only let a dog come near its nest, and see what the weasel will do if it’s got young ones. Out it will rush, and fasten on the dog’s nose in an instant, and there it will hang, although it is such a little thing, not above seven or eight inches long.

Nor is the weasel the only courageous creature of this species, for when a



STOAT

once gets hold of a hare, it’s all over with him I can tell you ; it’s no use the hare running off, for wherever he goes,

there the stoat is hanging at his throat, and the hare seems to know well enough it's all up with him, so hops off for a few yards, and then gives it up for a bad job. There isn't a bolder little beast of its size in England than the stoat. If the prey it is pursuing takes to the water, after him goes the stoat, for it can swim like a water-rat; and if even it loses sight of the game it is in pursuit of, it can still follow it by the scent. What would you think of a great ugly fellow coming into your house, some cold winter's morning, eating you up, and then taking possession of it as if it was his own? This is the way the brute of a stoat sometimes serves the poor blind mole; he walks into the house, without either making him a bow, or saying, "How do you do?" eats up the poor mole for breakfast, then creeps into its nest, and has a comfortable nap, as if he'd a right to it. I wonder how he would like a good wire-haired terrier to serve him the same trick; and you may depend upon it, were one only to catch him, he would; and, although it would be very cruel, I couldn't feel much sorrow for the stoat after all.

One amongst the many of our boyish haunts was the Old Hall, a large, desolate building, which it was our delight to ramble over. Through the centre, and under the middle of the wings, spanned great gloomy archways; and dark ruined staircases went winding up into turrets, and into huge mouldering rooms, which, when we shouted, sent back strange echoes that would have turned the cheek of a timid boy pale only to have heard them. In and out were grim carved heads, monsters whose living likeness never moved upon earth, with eyes on each side of their mouths, and arms growing out of their cheeks, all cut in grey old granite, and looking terrible when the shadows of evening settled down upon them, or the moonlight streamed down in streaks of white, making lighter the portions it fell upon, or steeping the shadows in blacker hues. A desolate and silent awe hung about the place

when you entered it; it seemed like treading the dominions of the dead. All around told of an age which had departed. Above were banqueting rooms, and wide passages, and deep bay-windows, which had been trod by many an armed baron in the days of yore. Below were dungeons, dark and deep, and cold and dismal; and as you walked over the floors above, the echoing sound of your footsteps fell low and lonely and melancholy, and made you feel sad and thoughtful without knowing why. In some ruinous oriel, far beyond our reach, the sun still glittered on remnants of painted glass, the head of a saint, or a serpent; gaudy hues of gold, and purple, and crimson, reflected for a moment on the dark oaken floor, or the blackened and ruinous wall. And a thousand old traditions hung about the place, of maidens who have been shut up and imprisoned in those dizzy turrets; of warriors who have been chained to the walls of those damp dungeons, in which rusty helmets, and coats of mail, and dead men's bones, have been found; then there were subterraneous passages, such as may be seen even in this day at Eltham Palace, entered by secret doors, which went deep and dark under ground below the moat, and into what once had been the ancient garden beyond. And while wandering over this solemn and ruinous place, many a scene rose before us which we had read of in the history of our country, and many a form seemed to pass by whose shadow darkens the annals of England; for, during the wars of the Roses, it had stood a stormy siege, and every yard of ground that stood about it, had been contested inch by inch. The invader's trumpet had rung through those gloomy gateways; archers had shot from the narrow loop-holes of those turrets; crossbow-men had manned those battlements; the drawbridge, which had crumbled into ruins ages ago, had been lowered from that sally-port; and across that moat had the mailed ranks rushed, with sword and battle-axe, struggling foot to foot, and hand to hand, until driven back again by the

invaders, when the sharp-toothed and grated portcullis dropped amid the thunder of its grating and grinding chains. We seemed, while wandering through those ruins, to be living amongst the Plantagenets and the Tudors, when the business of life was divided into battles and bloodshed, to hunting the deer in the broad unbounded forests, the chanting of matin and vesper, and the processions of solemn monks through the long aisles of old cathedrals. Every hall, every chamber, and every turret, had its legend; and in one of the latter tradition had laid the scene of a tragical story, which had been handed down from sire to son through many generations, and which they believed to be as true as that the grey old turret itself was still in existence. In that old hall John of Gaunt had once resided; his armorial bearings are yet carven in a dozen places. His daughter had been carried off by a young knight, who lived in a neighbouring castle, the foundations of which alone are now visible. She was pursued and overtaken before she had reached the stronghold of her lover, brought back by her father, and by him imprisoned in the central turret. A few hours after, the old castle was besieged by a troop of horsemen: John of Gaunt and his followers were compelled to flee, and leave the fortress in the hands of the invaders. Amid the struggle the prisoner in the turret was forgotten. Days passed away, and the conquerors, unconscious of her presence, left her unknowingly to perish: nor was it until her father had returned with a strong reinforcement, and again driven the besiegers from his stronghold, that her fate became known. You may readily imagine the effect that a visit to the top of that tower had on us, imaginative boys. We used to wonder to ourselves in which corner she was found dead; how her father looked, and what he said, when he burst open the door of the tower; whether there was nothing in the apartment by which she might have clambered up to those loop-holes, and made her wants known. These and a hundred similar

thoughts used to cross our mind whenever we visited that spot. Although we made sad havoc of history, confusing dates and periods, mingling all sorts of arms and architecture together, making Crusaders of the Saxons, and putting the Normans in battle against the Danes; still these very errors were of use in after days, compelling us to look more narrowly into the written annals of our country, and causing us to become better acquainted with the events which really had occurred amidst such scenes and ruins as these.

The very act of climbing up those dark, winding, and wandering staircases, required no small courage; and no boy who was in heart a coward would have dared to have hidden himself alone when we played at "Hide-and-Seek" in that great rambling and deserted building. Not that there is anything to fear in such places—no more than there is in one's own home, unless it is to slip through some hole; although foolish old nurses will tell you all sorts of tales, about ghosts, and spirits, and such-like nonsense, all of which are false stories, and which you will laugh at as you grow older. True enough we used to frighten one another sometimes, by concealing ourselves, and making all kinds of awful noises; and one night I remember two of us hiding in one of the turrets, and seeing, amid the darkness, a pair of great eyes fixed upon us; then there was a flapping of wings, a loud "too-whoo, too-whoo, tu-whit, tu-woo-woo," and out of the ruined window sailed a great grey owl. Owls, and a few bats and jackdaws, were the only ghosts we ever met with in that desolate mansion; and we dare say that if all the stories which are told could be proved, such as these would be found to make up the bulk of spirits which are said to "haunt the night," and would turn out to be all fables and falsehoods.

"Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" That hath ever seemed to us the oldest of all summer-sounds. "Cuckoo—Cuckoo" it still sings as it alights upon the silver-stemmed birch, the colour of whose bark

THE CUCKOO.

matches the sober hue of the bird's plumage. Who, unless they knew, would credit that such a little red mouth could make itself heard for a full mile round? Strange things do they tell of that noisy ash-coloured bird, with its black and white tail, of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds and that even the young of



THE CUCKOO,

when hatched (a fearless usurper, like its parent, of all rights), will throw out the naked brood amid which it has been nursed. One naturalist has recorded, from his own observation, that he saw a cuckoo's egg in a hedge-sparrow's nest, and that in a short time a young cuckoo and two sparrows were hatched, which he saw in the nest together; that in the evening of the same day the two young hedge-sparrows were excluded, and the cuckoo the sole occupant of their house. This the cuckoo accomplishes by working itself to the very bottom of the nest, until feeling one of the young ones on its back, it then, by a sudden jerk, throws out the callow brood upon the ground. That the cuckoo returns again, and feeds and rears its young, is the

opinion of many, although we believe that it is left to the mercy of the stranger-bird whose young it has destroyed. I well remember once seeing a cuckoo attack the nests of several swallows, in an old town in Lincolnshire. The song of a cuckoo heard ringing in a market-place, could not fail of drawing the attention of many of the inhabitants. It flew from nest to nest, pursued by the whole congregation of swallows, who seemed determined to wage war against this common enemy ; and after several fruitless attempts to deposit its egg in the nests of the swallows, the cuckoo, pursued by the whole colony for some distance, at length flew across the river, and was lost amid the distant scenery. I have often wished that it had succeeded in leaving its egg behind in any one of the swallows' nests, in order that I might have had proof whether it returned to feed and rear its young.

But see what a beautiful scene is this stretching beside the village and beyond the river ! What a picturesque appearance has that row of stately elms which overhang the footpath along the bank ! What a noble sweep the river takes at the foot of those hills, below which it curves its silver arm, then dwindles away in the perspective, and is lost amid the wooded distance ! Here sheep bleat, and jingle their musical bells as they crop the wild thyme from the bee-haunted hillocks, or browse among the luxuriant clover in the neighbouring pastures. Knee-deep, the plump-sided oxen graze, or, chewing the cud, lie half buried among the flowers of summer. The heavy waggon with its grey tilt, rumbles slowly along up the steep acclivity, on whose summit stands the old mill, its rent sails turning round with a lazy motion, as if half hesitating whether it should stand still or move. Here and there we see figures crossing the landscape, the angler with his wicker basket borne on the butt end of the fishing-rod which rests upon his shoulder, moving leisurely along the bank, or pausing every now and then, as if selecting some favourite spot for the

morrow's sport. The woodman in his forest-stained dress, followed by his faithful dog, and bearing the bundle of fagots upon his back, which he will add to the great pile already reared up beside his hut, and stored to meet the yet distant winter. You hear the song of the milkmaid, and can just see the white kit which she balances on her head, beside the long hedgerow by which she is passing. The red cow which she has left in the meadow stands lowing beside the gate; a calm beauty hangs about the deep blue of the heavens, while the earth is steeped in the golden splendour of an unclouded sunshine. The breeze scarcely awakens a ripple upon the river, more than is made by the swallow when she stoops down and laves her breast as she flies. The willows beside the bank bend with a gentle and dreamy motion, as if composing their feathery heads to sleep; and the little ripples creep so feebly upon the shore, that they scarcely rock the slender reeds which skirt the lowest slope of the water-course. The whole scene is broken into beautiful little pictures, every one of which a good artist might transfer to canvass, and hang his studio with a hundred morsels of landscape.

What a blessing it is to be born in a country like England, where green hills tower, wild woods wave, and clear rivers flow through hundreds of miles of sweet pastoral scenery—where men dare give utterance to their thoughts, and no one, unless he is mean enough to do so, need become the slave of opinion—where oppression and wrong are dragged forth into the light of day, and no matter how high may be the rank, or great the wealth, of the offender, they cannot protect him from public censure—where talent can take its proud stand beside title, and the highest offices in the realm have been obtained by men who had no renowned ancestry to boast of. These things ought to make every English boy feel proud of his country; not for its conquests abroad, but the great moral changes which have been wrought by the lovers of peace, who

have done their duty at home. It is my task to draw your attention to peaceful England, to its rural homesteads and green secluded places, not to what are misnamed its glorious victories and splendid conquests ; for, however stirring may be the accounts of the many great battles we have won, you must ever bear in mind that such painful triumphs were purchased by leaving many a poor child fatherless, and many a fond mother a widow ; that the sound of the trumpet, the neighing of the war-horse, and the thundering roll of artillery, were accompanied with the groans and heart-rending shrieks of dying men—some left all night to bleed to death on the battle-field, others speechless and perishing for want of water, and writhing in agony, crushed by wheels and the hoofs of horses, which, during the retreat or pursuit, had passed over them. Such are the miseries by which great victories are won. Remember, that to cultivate the arts of peace, to instruct and enlighten and better the morals and circumstances of your fellow-men, is to win the admiration of the truly good ; that war, even in a just cause, is a dreadful scourge and a fearful evil ; and he who endeavours to unite nation to nation in a common brotherhood, will be able to look death in the face more boldly than the bravest warrior that ever shed human blood. A courageous heart never covets a quarrel, but is ever ready when danger appears : a brave man would die in the defence of his children, in protecting his own home ; and he would also sooner die than destroy the home of another who had done him no injury. War would soon cease, if those who love it were left to fight it out amongst themselves.

See where that volume of smoke rises above the faded gold of the furze-bushes, twisting and coiling its spiral column of intense blue through the wide-spreading and forked branches of the ancient oak, like a cloud that has lost its way, and is struggling to regain its place again in the floating marble of heaven. Saw ye that little ragged boy, whose face is the

A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT.

colour of a ripe hazel-nut, peep out from beneath the under wood? Depend upon it we are nearing the neighbourhood of



A GIPSY ENCAMPMENT,

and it was the smoke of their camp-fire which we saw in the distance, blending so beautifully with the foliage of the old oak. It seems to have been washing-day with them. I wonder what a London laundress would think of the colour of their linen! and yet where in the world could we find a sweeter drying-ground than the corner of this wide wood? or wish for better air than blows across the broad and open common? Into what a number of little pictures the foreground of the forest is broken!—children playing at “Hide-and-seek” among the fan-like leaves of the fern, and behind the prickly gorze-bushes—donkeys turned loose, and grazing here and there, free to choose their pasturage wherever they please—masses of yellow and white drapery hung out to dry, and fluttering from every bush around the encampment—here a dog half asleep, and there a sun-burnt gipsy, leaning on his elbow and side, and while he

smokes his pipe, watching the old woman in the red cloak, who is attending to the contents which simmer in the large iron pot suspended from three stakes above the fragrant wood-fire. Even the grey blankets which form the arched roofs of their low tents, stand out in rich contrast beside the wide under-wood and the deep background of trees ; beyond which the eye falls upon interminable vistas of forest scenery. There is scarcely a linnet's nest in that wide range of furze and fern undiscovered by those ragged gipsy boys ; and whenever they have heard the ring-dove coo in the wood, they have set out and looked up almost every tall tree, to see if they could not descry the two white eggs shining through the lattice-like floor of its open nest ; and when once they saw a bird, if there was no stone at hand, they would throw up the first heavy clod or dry stick they came near, with so sure an aim, that unless the feathered chorister took to its wings, it was almost certain of being brought to the ground. A wild, lawless, and merry life do these gipsies lead ; sheltering, wherever they can, in the towns in winter, and in summer time establishing their residence by the side of a wood, at the corner of a common, or in the picturesque nook of some desolate heath,—taking care, however, never to be beyond the sound of the cock-crow of some neighbouring village. Many a silly country maiden parts with her hard-earned shilling that she may have her fortune told by the swarthy and keen-eyed gipsy, who slyly pockets the money and afterwards laughs at her folly, trying hard at the same time to beg the very gown off the country girl's back. They would promise that either you or I should one day inherit an estate worth ten thousand a-year, were we only to give them sixpence, and allow them to examine the lines on the palm of the hand ; and when they returned to their camp, they would show the silver coin, and exclaim, "Fools and their money are soon parted." And yet there are many so foolish as to believe that the gipsies can tell their fortunes, and well do they deserve

to lose their money and be laughed at for being such simpletons.

Although, as I have before said, spring is the season when birds build, and when we shall have so much to say about their nests; yet I am sure you will be pleased with what I shall tell you about the Bottle-tit, or, as we used to call it, the Pudding-poke, a name no doubt derived from the peculiar form of its nest. What think you to its laying from twelve to twenty eggs, each of which is not larger than a horse-bean? I remember myself taking a nest in Park-house Lane, near Gainsborough, which contained fifteen beautiful white and spotted eggs; a number that, if weighed, would be nearly twice the weight of the bird. You would be delighted to watch a regiment of these little fellows marching up a tree, they seem to be playing the game of "Follow my Leader;" and there is no harm in believing that birds have their games as well as boys. Away goes one little tit up a branch, followed by a whole string of tits, and as he runs along, he keeps crying, "Twit, twit, twit!" and I have no doubt he means to say, "Now, my little bottle tits, come along, don't be frightened, if you slip you have only to open your wings and you are safe; a little higher, my dears, up under that broad roof of leaves, right over this nice soft moss. Oh la! it is rather too dark here, and the leaves are so close together that I cannot see the sunshine through them; a little higher, my dears."—"Twit, twit," they answer—"A little exercise will do us no harm this fine morning. Isn't this a nice spot? but, oh dear! there are so many of you behind that I must keep moving to make room for you, and really I think it's more pleasant at the top than it is here; we shall have such a beautiful prospect on the topmost branches, and there will be plenty of room for us there you know; and then I can look round upon you, and pay my respects to you all." "Twit, twit," say they; and up they go to the very summit, amongst the sunshine and the glittering

leaves; and when they are too warm, they come hopping down again, and then as if they did not know their own minds for a minute together, away they start, with a “twit, twit, twit,” for the top again; and so they play with one another all day long.

And this little bird builds such a curious nest—supposing you doubled both your hands, and placed them one above another, and could make them perfectly round, well, that would be about the shape and size of a nest; and if you opened one finger to make a hole at the side, that would be like the place in which the pudding-poke enters its nest. But I cannot make you understand how beautifully and curiously it is woven together; first it takes a soft green moss, then speckles it outside with that rich flaky stuff which you see on the stems of trees or old railings, and which are called lichen, or livewort, though boys would call it rough white moss; then it takes the egg-nests of spiders, and these are drawn out and imbedded amongst the wool, looking, when you stretch the nest, like ropy-bread in hot weather. Well, when all this is done, she covers it over at the top to keep out the wet, and uses such moss as comes nearest in colour to the branches amid which it is built: then comes a beautiful lining of soft small feathers, which, if taken out and spread upon a table, would astonish you; you would scarcely credit that so large a quantity could be compressed into so small a compass. If as many young ones are hatched as there are eggs, I cannot tell how the old birds can get to feed them; one would fancy that they must lie one on the top of the other, like a swarm of bees when they alight; and that in hot weather, and in so warm a retreat, there must, we imagine, be many deaths in so large a family from suffocation alone. I forgot to tell you that this is one of the least of British birds, the golden-crested wren being the only one known that is smaller. Oh how little do we know of the habits and customs of the birds and animals which we are accustomed to see almost every day—how little of

His wisdom who suffereth not a sparrow to fall to the ground unheeded! The dispensations of an all-wise Providence are as yet a mystery to man. Naturalists may study and write, and the more they learn, the more they find to marvel at: the paths of knowledge seem to lead only nearer unto God, and the clearer our understanding, the greater is our astonishment at the wonders wrought by His own Almighty Hand.

But our ramble round the wood, and from the gipsy-camp, has again brought us beside the river, though at a point which we have not before visited. The corner of that shelving bank, which partly fronts the wooden bridge, and overhangs the mouth of the deep water-course, by which the wide marshes are drained, was for several years haunted by a large



OTTER.

Many a time, concealed behind the rushes, have I watched its motions in the water, as it swam about on the surface, or dived beneath in pursuit of fish. Beautiful were its actions, stemming the current, or gliding down with the stream—for of all swimmers, its attitude is perhaps the most elegant. It was wonderful to watch how suddenly it would leave off its

play, disappear under the water in an instant the moment it saw a fish gliding beneath, and rise again, after it had caught it, at a considerable distance from the spot where it first dived. Beautiful must its motions have been beneath the water, could we but have seen it shooting to and fro, up and down, in every direction : now against the current, then off like an arrow with the stream, just as the fish darted about and endeavoured in vain to escape. Then to watch it bearing its prey to the shore, and holding the fish in its paws, when it would begin at the head, and eat its way downward, until only the tail of the fish was left. Many a chase had we after him, with our dogs ; and fine sport it was when he took to the water, and baffled his pursuers by diving ; sometimes keeping under until their patience was exhausted, or rising unawares, at the most unexpected spot, to breathe ; and more than one unfortunate dog has he dragged with him under the water, and would speedily have drowned it, had not the alarmed brute loosed his hold while under, and swam, half breathless, to the shore. It is stated that the otter will sometimes drive a whole shoal of fish before it, circling round them as he swims, until, finding that they cannot escape, they will throw themselves out of the water upon the shore. The form of the otter is well adapted for swimming, with its long flattened body and broad tail, by which it steers itself as with a rudder, while its legs are short, and capable of being turned every way ; and in addition to all these admirable qualifications for swimming, it is also web-footed. Its head is broad and flat ; its upper lip thick, with the eyes placed very near the nostrils ; its colour is a dim whitish grey varying into brownish tints underneath. There are numerous instances on record of this animal having been tamed, and taught to catch and bring home fish. What boy would not like to have a tame otter, which he might teach to fetch and carry the same as a dog does ? What an agreeable companion one would be to ramble with by a river side ; to

see him plunge in head foremost every now and then, and bring out a large fish between his teeth, lay it at your feet, and start off again until he had provided enough for a family dinner? Would it not be a treat, when rambling some fine morning between the slope of the river and the shelving bank, to discover an otter's nest, with three or four young ones lying snugly among the grass and reeds in some hole, or under the hollow roots of a tree; to bring them home, and feed them at first with small fish, then by degrees diet them on bread and milk; and oh, what a proud day it would be when they had grown big enough, to give them names, and to see each one come as it was called; to take them out for a run on the river bank; to see them rush into the water head over ears, one after the other, and each to return with a fine fish in its teeth? This would be something to talk about; and what boy would not be proud to become the possessor of a little pack of otters?

But lest I should weary you with too many descriptions of birds and animals, and trees and flowers, and other country scenes, I will tell you about a poor boy whom I knew; and who having lost his parents, set about providing for himself, and by his own exertions obtained a livelihood. After his father and mother died, he got a situation under a fishmonger, where he was employed to carry home the fish purchased by customers. But this was only for a short time, until the boy whom he had succeeded recovered from illness. He had, however, given such satisfaction to his employer by his industry and attention, that the fishmonger lent him a basket, and allowing him a profit of a penny or two on each pair of soles, or whatever fish he might sell, thus gave him a chance of doing the best he could for himself. By great care and perseverance he soon became master of a few shillings, and now began to speculate, buying at times a whole fish of his employer, and running the risk of selling it. And now you

might see him sometimes set off in a morning with a whole cod-fish or a whole salmon in his basket, together with his large knife and scales, and as ready to cut six ounces as six pounds, to accommodate his customers; and thus he would come and go several times in a day, sometimes getting rid of two or three large fish. By degrees, his customers began to tell him overnight what they should like for the next day; and, as he found his old master occasionally supplying him with very indifferent fish, he began to think whether he could not find a better market, and so deal at the first hand. This he named to several of his friends, and at last it reached the ears of a captain belonging to one of the steamers, who told him that he would give him a run and back to Hull for nothing when he liked; and that, when there, he might purchase at the best market; and more than this, he lent little Bob a sovereign. "Poor lad!" said he, "he never ate a crust but what he earned since his parents died, and he ought to be encouraged." The next day saw Bob a regular fishmonger. One neighbour lent him an old white deal table, to place his stock upon; another, a wash-tub, in which to keep his clean water: and there, at the end of the court in which he was born, in the wide open street, along which scores of passengers passed every hour, did Bob open his new establishment. A proud day was it for him, I can tell you! Oh! you should have seen him with his little blue apron on, and his cold red hands, wielding his long sharp knife, and scraping some fresh silver-looking fish with the edge of it, or wiping another down gently with his clean cloth, as he pointed out to his customers the freshness of this, the plumpness of that, the bright eyes of a third, the red gills of a fourth; then adding with pride, "I bought them out of the fishing-boats myself, just as they came in, an hour or two after they'd been caught!" Before night he sold every fish. Not an ounce was left; and his customers declared that what they had purchased was much fresher and

sweeter than they had ever had of his old master. After a few more trips to Hull, he attracted the attention of a fisherman whom he had several times dealt with, and who, having a large family of his own, said, "Thee beest but a little 'un to begin for theysen ; and, between thee and me and the captain, I think I might manage to look thee out a little lot every morning, and send them down by the first steam-boat, so that thou'd have 'em fresh and nice ; and soe save thee all this hallacksing and trapassing up and down, which I see no mander o' use in ; and it would do thee a deal o' good, lad, and me no harm. Captain would be good enough to bring the money back ;"—and so it was arranged ; and every morning, regularly as the day came, there was little Bob to be seen on the steam-packet wharf, with the truck he had borrowed, and plenty of good-natured sailors ready to help him ashore with his hamper of fish ; for he was such a little one, and had neither father nor mother, that almost anybody would assist him without being asked. And now the deal white table was found too little, and he had to borrow another. Then a butcher, who had given up standing in the market, said ; "He had got an old stall he could sell him cheap ;—true, one of the tressels wanted a leg, and the front pole was missing ; but old Hack, the joiner, would put that to rights for a shilling ; and the price of the stall would be—why—some morning when he happened to have in a stock of fish, he might send him a 'boiling' for dinner." So Bob agreed, and the captain of the steamer had an old sail, which he said "was about worn out ;—true, there was a hole or two in it, but he might give old Betty Buttery a bit of fish to set a patch or two on, and it would make a capital tilt for his stall, to keep the sun off his fish." And so Bob got on, bit by bit, step by step, from a stall to a shop ; from bowling a truck, to keeping a cart, a horse, and a man, until at last he became the first fishmonger in the town, and had to supply his old master at the wholesale prices.

This shows what may be done by industry, perseverance, and honesty ; for an idle boy would never have striven for a livelihood like little Bob the Fishmonger.

I will now tell you about a strange bird, called



THE GREBE.

or Dabchick, for I wish to make you acquainted with many things that you could not comprehend, were you only to read dry hard books on Natural History, such as are filled with learned phrases, that only men who have dedicated a whole life to the study of can clearly understand. The nest of this curious bird has long been a subject of dispute amongst naturalists ; many of whom, I strongly suspect, never saw it. But first I must describe the wild spot where the Grebe was in the habit of building,—a spot which will interest you all the more

through knowing that it formed a subject of dispute between Hotspur and Glendower, in the first part of Shakspeare's "King Henry the Fourth," act iii. scene 1. You must know then that in Shakspeare's time the river Trent, which divides the counties of Nottingham and Lincoln, made a large circle of four or five miles, which Shakspeare calls "a huge half-moon," though it is not so, but bears a greater resemblance to a ring with a small piece out, and that small piece, which we will suppose to be the sixteenth part, was all the actual progress made either up or down, after having traversed the immense circle of the ring. Well, this large circular portion of the river, which was navigable in Shakspeare's time, has been dry for the last half century, saving where here and there, in the deepest portions of the bed, pools of water still remain. Fancy yourself walking in the bed of a deep river—in a place where, for hundreds and hundreds of years, as far back, no doubt, as the times of the ancient Britons, who there had paddled their wicker boats, along which Dane and Saxon had in succession sailed—fancy what emotions it must have awakened in the mind of an imaginative boy, to have seen the great high banks upheaving on either hand, and to know that he was walking in that great dry channel, where, during the unnumbered years that it was a wide deep rolling river, hundreds had, no doubt, been drowned; to think that ships had sailed over your head; had, perhaps, sunk, and were buried many fathoms deep in the mud beneath your feet; that you walked over the skeletons of fishes, and the buried antiquities of the earliest inhabitants who first navigated this broad English river. A solitary ruined chapel was the only ancient structure which stood upon those waterless banks, and that was in ruins; Time had obliterated every record on those old monuments, and the grey rank grass had grown so tall, that it had fallen down for want of strength to support such an unnatural height. While walking there you might fancy that you were wandering through a silent

world, every trace of whose inhabitants had been swept away, blotted out, and destroyed, like the bright arrowy waters which once shot their rippled silver through the winding expanse of those high piled banks ; and now, where the huge sturgeon once swam, and the black-backed porpoise played, where the moon-lit scales of the salmon glittered, and the enormous pike darted upon its prey,—there the bittern boomed, and the tufted plover complained, and the large marsh-frog croaked through the deepening twilight,—rushes and reeds, and sword-leaved waterflags, sharp on the edge as a scimitar, overhung with willows and alders, shot up from under every knoll above the deep water-pools, and shadowed every little islet round which the mysterious current coiled, and rolled, above dark unexplored depths, from whose waters the boldest of us shrank back in terror, for into those deep holes we believed the vast mass of the old river-waters had settled, and that they went downward and downward for evermore.

And here it was that the wild grebe built its nest, among reeds and flags and aquatic plants, from which she selected the material for her home, and which were scarcely distinguishable from the wild withered sedge that waved around. The nest was of itself a load almost as much as a boy could well carry, and generally at least a foot thick at the bottom ; the strong reeds and rushes which grew around were also bent and woven into it, although the roots were still firm in the ground, so that it was at times impossible to remove the nest without cutting away the growing flags to which it was attached. At first we were strangely puzzled by one day discovering eggs in the nest, and the next day finding it to all appearance empty. For some time we were deceived, until one day, thrusting our hand into a nest, into which it was difficult to peep, we found the eggs, beneath a thin covering of dry reeds,—whether the bird had done this to conceal them during her absence, or to keep up that warmth which is necessary for hatching the eggs, we must leave to the learned

naturalist to decide. Strange stories are told of this bird sailing away in her nest, and navigating it like a ship, which I cannot for a moment believe; that the nest might be washed away during a heavy rain is likely enough, although, secured as I have seen it by the rushes which grow around, I am more inclined to believe that it would remain submerged in the water. As to its thrusting its feet through, and so paddling along with its nest, the immense size of its foot will prove that it could never force a hole through a substance a foot thick. The eared grebe is a singular-looking bird; the bill is black, as also are the head and neck; while a few long yellow feathers extend backwards from the sides of the head; it lays from four to five white eggs, and commonly breeds in the bed of the old river which we have attempted to describe. When alarmed, it will dive under the water, and remain there a long time, with only its bill visible. The water-rat is said to be a great destroyer of its eggs; but those who say so know nothing about the matter, for, as I have told you before, the water-rat lives entirely upon vegetables; whilst diving, however, the bird sometimes falls a prey to the voracious pike.

Hitherto I have told you nothing about the wonderful habits of insects; and were I to communicate to you one quarter of the marvels I have read about, and what I have witnessed during my rambles in the country, I should more than fill my Book of the Seasons with this subject alone. I should not, however, consider that I had done my duty in this work unless I gave you some account of the Caterpillars; and I shall begin with those who, almost as soon as they are hatched, roll up a leaf, and make their abode within its folds. You have, no doubt, often when walking in the garden observed the leaves of the lilac fold together; if you have noticed it at all, you have probably thought that this was caused by the heat, or that the leaf was withering, and about to fall off. Upon a closer observation, however, you will have discovered that

this was not the case, but that the leaf was beautifully rolled back, fold upon fold, as you would roll a sheet of paper ; and that to prevent the leaf from springing back to its natural level position, the little architect has prevented it from uncoiling, by fixing a number of silken threads across the leaf. From this little insect springs a very pretty brown-coloured moth. There is another species which takes up its abode in the leaves of the rose-tree or currant-bush : this you will see in every garden ; it is known by its dark head and six feet. As if it knew its own weakness, and the strength which summer gives to the sap, and foresaw to what a size the leaves would grow, — it commences its labour in the spring, and begins by rolling up the whole bud in which it is hidden ; and then as the summer advances, it has nothing to do but to devour its way from leaf to leaf, until it illustrates a homely proverb, by fairly “ eating itself out of house and harbour.” Others, again, such as frequent willows, and almost every kind of osier, fold the leaves up into a beautiful bundle, which they bind together. Were you to cut the leaves across with a sharp instrument, you would be delighted to see the graceful form into which they are folded. Another class take up their abode in old walls, their food being the moss and lichen which grow thereon ; these, enclosed in a box with moss, construct for themselves a beautiful nest ; and there is an old wall, surrounding a manor-house at Beckenham, near London, in which numbers of these caterpillars have taken up their abode.

There is another kind of caterpillar, which feeds upon the wood of trees, and makes itself a house by eating away the inside of it. This in time turns to the goat-moth, although it is three years in arriving to a perfect state. The only method of becoming acquainted with the manners of these interesting insects is to keep them confined in little boxes with glass doors, and feed them with whatever we first find them upon, if it can be procured. A celebrated naturalist found a red

caterpillar, with a few tufts of hairs on it, feeding on the flowers of the nettle; he placed it in a paper box, and in a few days discovered that it was beginning to prepare its oocoon, which it formed by gnawing pieces of paper from the lid of the box, although it neither lacked the leaves or stalks of nettles amid which it was found. The watchful naturalist, thinking that it might soon eat its way out, and so escape, began to fasten pieces of rumpled paper to the lid of the box by means of a pin, and these the insect soon began to chop up into such pieces as it needed for the completion of its structure. Four weeks after a beautiful dark-coloured moth, mottled with white, made its appearance. Surely to watch such interesting operations as these would be more pleasing to any boy than to destroy the insects.

There is another curious race of insects well known to fishermen, which build their habitations under the water, and which they form of stones, shells, sand, or wood, all strongly cemented together: others select portions of reed, or hollow straws, leaving a long piece to project over the head; so that, when resting at the bottom of the stream, it looks like a piece of sunken and broken reed; nor would you, unless you knew, suppose for a moment that it was the habitation of an insect. But the most skilful of all the caddis-worms, which build under water, is the one which makes itself a hollow tube out of small stones, composed of such angles as would frighten any human architect; nor would a man attempt to form anything like an arch out of such irregular materials, unless they were first cut and hewed into a proper form. Yet all this is managed by the little insect, selecting such stones as fit into each other, contriving also to leave the lower part smooth and even, so that it may drag its house along with greater ease when moving at the bottom of the stream; neither will water dissolve the cement used by these curious insects; nor must I omit stating that that por-

tion of the body which projects from the doorway of the cell is hard and firm, while the portion that remains within is soft. Thus you see that even they are adapted for their state, and armed against trifling accidents ; and throughout all nature we shall find this to be the case—no matter how insignificant an insect may appear, it is so constructed as to be able to provide itself with food and shelter ; and we cannot remove the decayed bark from a tree, the moss from a wall, or even a coiled-up leaf, without discovering, after a minute survey, that each of these is the home of some living object.

“ The same wisdom,” says Bonnet, in his “ Contemplation of Nature,” “ which has constructed and arranged with so much art the various organs of animals, and has made them concur towards one determined end, has also provided that the different operations, which are the natural results of the economy of the animal, should concur towards the same end. The creature is directed towards his object by an invisible hand ; he executes with precision, and by one effort, those works which we so much admire ; he appears to act as if he reasoned, to return to his labour at the proper time, to change his scheme in case of need. But in all this he only obeys the secret influence which drives him on. He is but an instrument which cannot judge of each action, but is wound up by that adorable Intelligence which has traced out for every insect its proper labours, as He has traced the orbit of each planet. When, therefore, I see an insect working at the construction of a nest or a cocoon, I am impressed with respect, because it seems to me that I am at a spectacle where the Supreme Artist is hid behind the curtain.”

“ For the whole earth is every way

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”

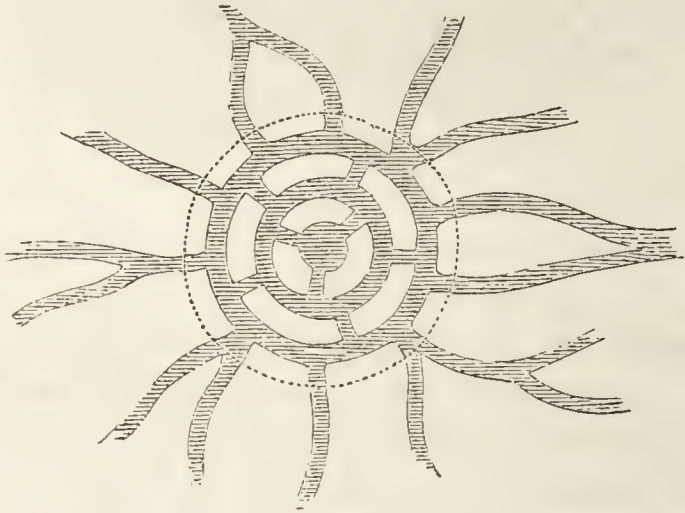
This little hillock of earth, covered with wild thyme, amongst which the summer-bees are now murmuring, was thrown up by the



MOLE,

or Mouldi-warp, as it is called by the country people; and if we had a spade, I would lay bare its little habitation, and show you such a wonderful encampment as you have rarely witnessed,—chambers, and galleries, and long winding passages which lead in all directions; and when opened, look not unlike the old puzzle which is called the plan of Troy. The earth, as you may tell by placing your foot upon it, is very strong and solid, for it has been well pressed and well beaten by the mole while making it. At the bottom of this hillock there is a gallery almost as round as a ring, and there is a smaller one also above it, of the same form; and to get from one gallery to the other it has made itself five passages, which go upward. Isn't that something like a house, think you, with five staircases, which lead to the upper story; but this is not half that I have got to tell you; it has also a chamber lower down than the lowest gallery which I have described, and you must know there is also another hole at the bottom of the chamber, which, after running down for a few inches, rises up again, and opens into a passage, or high-road, if we may so call it, of the encampment. But when in this passage, it can

turn back again, and enter the circular gallery at the bottom, which I have before described, and take its choice of any of the nine streets which branch out from this lower passage. What a place would this be to play at "Hide-and-Seek" in, if it were but big enough; and as it so very curious, I must present you with a picture of it. And here you have an engraving of the nest, or



ENCAMPMENT OF THE MOLE.

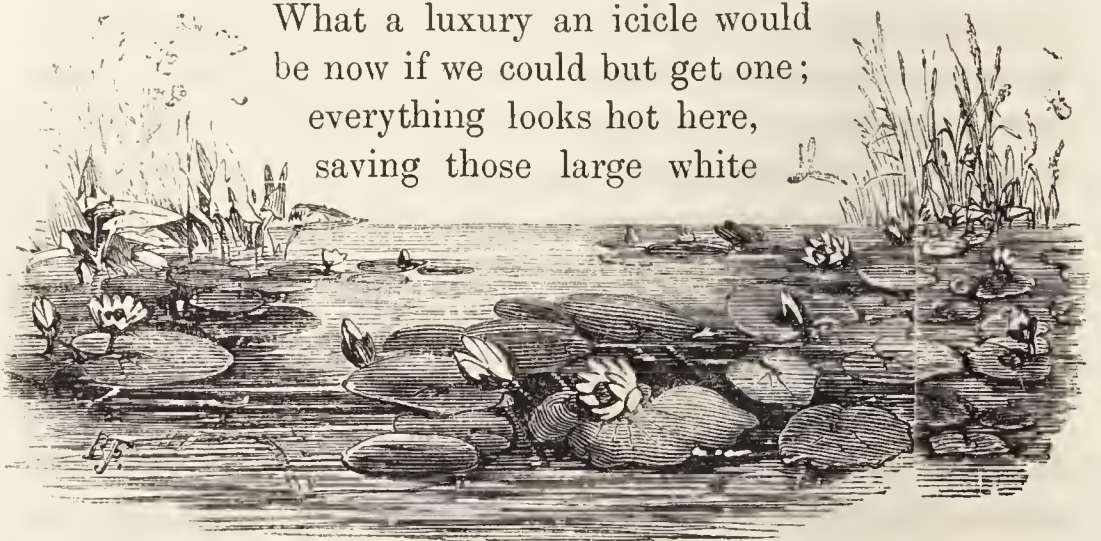
Is it not wonderful? You little thought, while looking upon this uninteresting hillock of earth, that it covered in such a marvellous building as this. You might wonder for what purpose it wanted such a number of roads and galleries, looking so many different ways; but when I tell you that this is its chase, or forest, or hunting-ground, and that it ranges here and there, up this passage, and down that, searching for earth-worms and insects, you will see at once the use of these numerous avenues, and the chance it has of obtaining larger quantities of food through having such extensive grounds to range in. But there is a larger run, which naturalists call the high-road, and along this he passes many times in the course of the day, to visit his several hunting-grounds, which branch out every way; and I can tell you necessity causes the

moles to be very polite to each other, for only one at a time can pass along this common high-road which seems to belong to the whole community of moles; so that, if two chance to meet, one is compelled to retire into one of the side-passages until the other passes; and sometimes this causes a fight, and then of course the weakest goes to the wall. But although they thus quarrel about the possession of the road, each seems to pay great respect to his neighbour's enclosure, one never taking possession of the hunting-ground another has made. It is in this common highway where the mole-catchers place the traps, as they know he has to pass it many times in the course of the day, to see what game there is in his preserve. You must not always expect to find its nest under a mole-hill, for it is oftener placed at the end of three or four passages, at some distance from the encampment; when, if you are fortunate enough to light upon the right spot, you may sometimes dig out four or five young ones in summer. It is a thirsty animal, requiring much drink; and the high-road, which I have so often mentioned, as being used by the whole community of moles, is sure to lead to a common run, which opens out near some ditch or pond; but when water is far distant, they will sink a well of their own, and dig downward and downward until they come to water. In pursuing a worm, it will sometimes follow it to the surface of the earth, devour it, and return back again into its burrow. It always looks fat, and has a sharp tapering nose, well adapted for turning up the earth: its eyes are very small, and I should think of but very little use in so dark a habitation. The fur is soft as silk, and bright as velvet; its colour is a deep black, although by shining the hair in the direction in which it lies, it has a greyish appearance: its feet are furnished with sharp nails, with which it scoops and digs away the earth, throwing the loosened dirt behind as it progresses with its work, and which it afterwards carries up and forms into those hillocks which

we so commonly see. In winter, when the earth is frozen hard, and its hunting-ground is cold and useless, and produces no food, it will dig a deep hole straight down, in order to reach the worms that have taken shelter there from the cold. It is also a good swimmer, and cares no more about crossing a brook than a water-rat. You little dreamed that such a curious animal and such a wonderful structure were to be found under this little hillock, which to look upon, saving for the few wild flowers which cover it, appears an object of no interest. And so shall we often find it in our walks through the world ; we kick aside a hollow stone, without thinking of the years that it must have taken, and the countless millions of fallen drops of water, to have worn away that cavity, while others that are worn into all kinds of fantastic shapes, must have been tossing about in the ocean and on the earth for unnumbered ages.

Oh, what a treat it is now to throw off one's coat and jacket, and lie down in the shade under some great tree, that stretches its broad branches far across the greensward ! while it is so hot that I wonder how the little birds can hop up and down the big branches at all, or open their beaks to raise even a chirrup, covered as they are all over with warm feathers.

What a luxury an icicle would
be now if we could but get one ;
everything looks hot here,
saving those large white



WATER-LILIES,

which seem sleeping amongst their broad dark leaves, on the clear waters of the moorland mere. Saw ye ever a more majestic flower? What a pure pearly white, showing the more clearly through being contrasted with the deep golden centre of the cup, and the rich green of the rounded leaves on which they seem to sleep. What grace there is in their motion, as they rise and fall with every ripple that ridges the broad surface of the mere! how cool and clear they are! And so they remain all night, closing, and half sinking down into the water, and sometimes scarcely leaving a leaf visible above the surface until sunrise the next morning, when they again open and lean upon their green silky beds, as they do now—the loveliest ladies of the lake: for “mere” is but the old Saxon name for a large pool or lake.

Pleasant is it to see a wild honeysuckle, hanging in long trails of crimson and white, along the wood-sides by which we pass; drooping above the red and white foxgloves with their beautifully speckled bells, which we used to gather and stick upon the tips of our fingers, calling them gloves: to see the glaring yellow charlock spreading everywhere over acres and acres of ground, with scarcely a patch of green between; recalling those fanciful gardens of the fairies which were covered every way with flowers of gold: to inhale the perfume of the meadow-sweet, which approaches nearer the smell of the fragrant heliotrope than the costliest garden flower that ever was cultivated: to see the banks glowing with the rich tints of the mallow—a half rose-like flush: and, above all, to wander by the side of reedy ponds, where the tall yellow flowers of the water-floats give such a sunny and summer look unto the sedgy scenery. Mingling with, and almost overpowering every other fragrance, comes the drowsy odour from the bean-fields,—the sweetest, saving that from the new-mown hay, of all summer smells. These were the pleasures that made our rural rambles so delightful; things which we dwell upon even now

with a sweet remembrance,—giving such a freshness to memory, and such a life-like reality to all we can recall, of the pleasant visions of our boyish days.

But I have got a laughable story to tell you about two old men, which you will find a good moral in; for it is a great shame, and very wicked, to pick sport out of the infirmities of mankind, even if we do no injury to any one. I well remember a waggish youth who would have fun, whatever it might cost him, and never seemed so happy as when he was about some work of mischief; and when he could amuse himself no other way, he would begin playing tricks with his deaf uncle. There was an old neighbour, who lived opposite, quite as dull of hearing as his uncle was, for neither the one nor the other could hear himself speak; and it was the delight of this scapegrace of a nephew to set these two deaf old men together by the ears; and as neither of them could hear what the other said, you may readily imagine what a droll scene an explanation must have been between them. Like the king in “Hamlet,” this graceless young scamp first poured his poison into the ear of one, then into the ear of the other; and he would begin by bawling out “Uncle!” into the drum of the ear of his deaf relative, who would lower his trumpet, and drink in every word of slander which this young mischief-maker uttered. “Uncle, old Billy Barton says you get drunk every night—that you run up a score everywhere, when any one will trust you—and that you owe money to every publican in Lincoln—and have never paid him the last half-guinea he lent you, uncle—and he stops everybody he meets to tell them of it!”

“He’s an old rascal—and doesn’t speak the truth—and I’ll have an action against him—that I will—if it costs me every shilling I’m worth. I’ve never been intoxicated since the last election; and as to money, I never borrowed a farthing of him in my life, or of anybody living—and I’ll go tell him

so to his face, that I will—the bad lying old rogue!” and he would take up his stout oaken walking-staff, and sally out to put his threat into execution, muttering to himself “fifty old rogues and a hundred old rascals;” and stamping his walking-staff savagely upon the ground every stride he took, until he worried himself into a regular towering passion, which was quite “nuts” to the rogue of a nephew; for the young scamp had been beforehand to old Billy Barton, cramming him with a parcel of lies, and telling him what his uncle had said about him.

“Mr. Barton!” he would holla into his ear, while old Billy was taking his walk at the other end of the town, “my uncle says you undid his styedoor last night, and let his pigs out—somebody saw you—and they’ve eaten up all the peas and young cabbage, and rooted up the flower-beds, and done five pounds’ worth of damage—and he’s gone to get a warrant out against you—and I thought I would tell you, that you might make it up with him without going to law.”

You may easily fancy how old Billy raved and stormed after such a charge as this, for, deaf as he was, he could make himself heard; and how he set off at once to repel the accusation and defend himself—not having time, in the heat of his passion, to inquire who this “somebody” was, that had seen him, and brought the charge against him.

Meantime the young scamp used to run and assemble his companions in the street, to witness, as he would say, “such a row between his uncle and old Barton;” and the nephew so managed matters, and measured his distance, that the two old men were almost sure to meet in the greatest thoroughfare in Lincoln. At it they would go as fast as ever their tongues could rattle, blowing one another up beautifully—foaming, and raving, and stamping their sticks upon the ground, and clenching their fists in each other’s faces—and neither of them hearing a word which the other said—but from the earnest

manner, and vehemence of action, each believing the other was maintaining the accusation which the mischief-making young dog had first founded. "You say I get drunk every night," the deaf old uncle would exclaim, stamping his stick as he spoke. "You say I turned your pigs out of the sty last night!" old Barton would exclaim, shaking his cane at him. "Shew me the man I ever owed a shilling to in my life!" roared out the one. "I never did anybody an injury since I was born!" bellowed the other. "I'll have an action against you for damaging my character," shouted the uncle, loud enough to be heard half way down the street, so loud, indeed, that the word damage struck the dull drum of deaf Billy's ear, and he echoed between his teeth—"Damages, you old rogue, you let 'em out yourself—you know you did—on purpose to injure my character, because I voted against you at the last election—you rabid old tory, you!" "I've got as many half-guineas as you," hollaed out the old uncle; "and have no need to borrow of anybody, thank God! you vile, bad, wicked, slandering, thief-looking, unhung, old rascal! I shall see you some morning whipped at a cart's tail! Oh! I wish the good old pillories still stood; I would buy a hamper of rotten eggs to pelt you with, that I would!" and he would bring his huge stick within a foot of poor harmless deaf Billy's face; then they would begin to collar one another, and no doubt there would soon have been "battle royal" between them, had not some peace-loving neighbour interfered, and, although he failed in reconciling them, patched up for the time a temporary cessation of hostilities.

So matters progressed, till the frequency of their quarrels caused some mutual friend to interfere, and inquire into the cause; when, to the astonishment and amusement of them both, "my nephew" was found out; and heartily did they laugh as the explanation was in turns hammered into their ears; and a dozen times did the merry old men rise and shake hands;

then sit down again to laugh; for the friend who reconciled them had concocted a scene of excellent mischief and retaliation, which they had agreed to put into operation; and the thought of it so tickled their old fancies with delight, that they roared again louder than they even did when abusing each other. Nay, we verily believe, that from the bottom of their hearts, they were glad that they'd had so many quarrels without any cause, merely for the sake of the "making it up," as they called it, in the presence of their common enemy. Nor was it long before an opportunity presented itself; for the nephew had been at his old work, and they pretended, as usual, to believe all that he said; and so well did they mimic a passion, and conceal their designs, that he, suspecting nothing, bade us, as he'd often done, to "make haste, and come along to see such a row between his uncle and old Barton."

Wicked dogs that we were! No hounds ever set off with more willingness to hunt a fox than we did to see a rupture between these two deaf old men; and, with the nephew at our head, away we went, helter-skelter, his laugh the loudest of all, and ringing out above all others, as if the entertainment had been got up for his sole amusement. Up he ran, rubbing his hands and kicking his heels with delight, as he shouted, "Now they're going to begin: take your places! Act 1st, Billy Barton stole uncle's chickens; Act 2nd, enter uncle to rob Billy Barton's apple-tree,—which, you know, we did for him. Up go the sticks; now for it! a real fight this time! Lay on, uncle! Strike hard, Billy!" And, without hearing, they both took him at his word; for they seized him in an instant, each laying hold of one side of his collar; and need I tell you, that we, who had so often laughed at his wickedness, were delighted to see him caught in his own trap? and, instead of pitying him, we only echoed his own words, and exclaimed, "Lay on, uncle! Strike hard, Billy!"—and, although they broke no bones, I can assure you they gave him such a thrash-

ing as caused him to remember the day when he first set two deaf old men together by the ears. And long as it is since, I can scarcely refrain from laughing, whilst recalling the astonished look of the nephew when they seized upon him;—how he turned up the whites of his eyes, first at one, then at the other, while his visage lengthened; and said (as plain as a countenance can speak), “caught at last!” But what made it less effective was, that both the old men laughed heartily the whole of the time they were beating him. First, the uncle began with, “I get drunk every night, do I!” Tap. Then came old Barton, with “I turned your uncle’s pigs out, did I!” Bang. Then again the uncle chimed in, with, “I robbed Billy Barton’s apple-tree, did I!” Thump. Then again Barton took up the chorus, with, “I stole your uncle’s chickens, did I!” Whack. And all this was diversified with so many “Oh dear mes!” and “Oh, I’ll never do so no more!” and “Oh, I beg your pardon!” with an accompaniment of cuts and capers on the part of the culprit: now a shoulder up, then a leg, that, as his uncle said when he had done, “he had made him for once in his life dance without a fiddle; and it would be a great pity, after telling so many tales, that they should be left without a moral.” And what was worse, everybody in Lincoln said that it served the nephew right; and the only injustice in the affair was, that we, who had so often shared in and countenanced his sins, ought to have partaken of a portion of his stripes. But, on this point, I beg to assure you that we disagreed with our respected friends, and could not see at all that we ought to be punished for laughing at the mischief manufactured by another. They, however, thought different; and I must leave it to you to decide which were in the right!

You see that bird which keeps mounting upward like the skylark, but whose song is no more to be compared to the notes of that beautiful warbler than the clamour of the rook is to the gushing melody of the blackbird—that is the

SNIFE.



SNIFE,

a bird which occasionally remains with us all the year, and is found in almost every part of England. In wet weather it resorts to the hills and woods, though its favourite haunt seems to be the meadows and marshes in the neighbourhood of rivers. It never wanders far for the materials with which it builds its nest. Should it be on a marsh, it takes the coarse grass which grows around it; if on a heath or moor, it makes use of the heather; generally, however, selecting a dry spot on which to build, but never far distant from some boggy or swampy place. The eggs, which are of an olive colour, blotched and spotted with dusky brown, are always found in the nest with their pointed ends placed inwards. The snipe is curiously marked. The black crown of the head is divided by a line down the middle; the back is black, and barred, and striped, with buff-coloured lines; the breast and belly white; and the black feathers of the tail spotted with deep orange towards the end. Some have compared the noise that it makes, when descending on the wing to the bleating of a goat; and many believe that this peculiar sound is produced by its wings.

When mounting in the air, it utters a shrill, sharp, piping sound. You would be delighted to see how quick, and to what a depth it sends its pointed bill into the earth after worms, for its long beak is nearly a full third of the length of the neck and body.

And now I must say a few words about Frogs and Toads, wishing you at the same time to remember that I have, in two or three instances, attempted to enlist your kind feelings in favour of such poor inoffensive animals, as it has too long been the fashion to persecute, before I draw your attention to this ill-used and harmless race; sincerely believing that when you have read all I have got to say, you will never again, wilfully, destroy either a frog or a toad. "But a toad," you exclaim, "is a poisonous reptile!" Believe me when I tell you this is not the truth; on the contrary, it is perfectly harmless, may be rendered tame, and even be taught to eat out of your hand. True, it is far from prepossessing in its appearance; but this is no excuse for your destroying it: were we, on the contrary, to encourage it in our gardens, and protect it, we should soon perceive its usefulness in the diminution of insects and worms which make such havoc amongst vegetation. You would be delighted to watch it before seizing upon its prey. For a moment or two it remains perfectly motionless and fixed as a stone, its eyes bent upon the insect, and its head thrown forward; when, the instant the object moves, it is struck by the tongue of the toad, and drawn into its mouth; and so rapid is the action, that it is scarcely the work of a moment, and unless your eye happens to alight upon it in the very tick of time, you would discover that the insect had gone, without seeing when, or where. It is also very amusing to see it seize upon a large, long worm, especially if it happens to lay hold of it in the middle; the poor worm twists and turns all kinds of ways on the outside of the jaws of the toad, and by its twining and

struggling, endeavours to escape ; but all in vain, for the toad makes use of its fore-feet, first shoving one end of it into its mouth, and then the other, until the whole is devoured. Gilbert White, in his "History of Selborne," tells us of some ladies who took a fancy to a toad, which used to come out every evening from a hole under the garden steps, and, after supper, was always taken up and placed upon the table, where it was fed : so that you see there were a few sensible people even more than half a century ago, who were not afraid of being poisoned by it. And Mr. Bell, in his "History of British Reptiles," makes mention of a very large one which he kept, that would sit on one of his hands while it ate from the other. I must also tell you, that the toad, like the snake, casts its skin, and now and then comes out with a new coat on his back, which he is, no doubt, as proud of as a charity boy is of his new suit at Easter. As to its being found alive in the centre of a solid rock, or in the heart of a large tree, where it has been supposed to have lived for hundreds of years, without either a mouthful of food or a breath of air, why I think it about as likely to be true as the tale of the horse, which its owner boasted he would teach to live upon nothing, and which, to nobody's astonishment but his own, died as soon as he began to reduce it to a straw a day. So has it turned out in every experiment which has been made to imprison toads, either in stone, plaster, or wood ; and although they have lived much longer than might have been expected, they have generally been found dead at the end of a few months. One or two, I believe, have lived over a year in this state of imprisonment ; but no animal requires less respiration, or, when not in motion, can live upon less food.

Those little dark-looking objects, which all of you must have seen swimming about by hundreds in ponds and ditches, with their large round heads and long tails, and something like

fins projecting out from each side of the neck, and which you call tadpoles, are young frogs ; and were it not that thousands upon thousands of them are devoured by newts and small fishes, they would soon multiply to such an extent, that, when fully grown, they would overrun the land. Few animals have more persecutors than the poor frogs ; it can never grow too big for the jaws of the voracious pike ; almost every kind of water-fowl feeds upon it ; it is the favourite food of the snake ; and as for stoats and weasels and pole-cats, they devour them by hundreds ; and there is hardly a bird of prey that does not feed upon them. Surely, then, this poor reptile has plenty of enemies, without being pelted to death or destroyed by cruel boys. Like the toad, it is a great destroyer of insects, and you will never find many slugs in a garden which is frequented by frogs ; it takes its food in the same manner, by throwing forward its tongue, which, in a state of repose, doubles back as you would fold a leaf ; its tongue also possesses a kind of sticky matter, to which the prey adheres. You have, no doubt, heard scores of them croaking when you have been walking out on a beautiful calm evening by the side of some long straggling dyke ; and to me it has ever seemed far from an unpleasant noise : and during my rambles by the side of such places, I have always made a point of looking where I planted my foot, that I might avoid trampling any one of them to death. Like many other reptiles it sleeps during the winter, burying itself in the mud at the bottom of the water, where they are often found in draining or digging out a water-course, huddled together by scores ; and I have seen a large spade-ful of them lifted out at once. When spring comes they are all alive and kicking again : for it is then that they bring forth their eggs, from which come those thousands of tadpoles that we see at this season of the year. You will sometimes observe a quantity of black spots in a large mass of clear jelly floating on the surface of the water. These black spots are the eggs of

the frog. But the most wonderful thing in the structure of these harmless reptiles is, that they have the power of breathing through the skin. This has been proved by tying up the head tightly with a portion of bladder, in fact, literally hanging them, then placing them in a vessel under water. If you ever want to see how far a frog can leap without doing it any injury, strike the ground smartly a few inches behind where it is squatted, with a stick, and away it will jump an astonishing distance. I should tell you that you will never find the tail which you see on young frogs on any of the old ones. Their motions in the water are beautiful, and I know no better tutor to teach you the art of swimming than a frog. Only watch narrowly its attitude, stretch yourself out as it does with the head elevated, and strike out in the same way with the hands and feet, and take my word for it you will soon be able to swim.

This is a true English picture, a smooth-shaven green, the sunshine streaming upon it, and glancing on the canvas tents and white dresses of the



CRICKET-PLAYERS.

Just look how the batsman stands. His foot firm—his eye fixed—the ball is delivered, it bounds beautifully, just his favourite height. What a swing he takes with his arms; that blow would fell a bullock. The ball looks no bigger than a bee in the air, with such force is it struck—so high is it sent, far away beyond the long fieldsman. “Run—run—run!” cries every voice; not a cross—not a slip; notch after notch is added, and the whole air rings again with the voices of the by-standers. But hush! a fresh bowler has taken up the ball; their favourite batsman looks a little thoughtful, for he well knows that peculiar turn of the wrist which so much baffles the ablest striker. Cautious and watchful are they both. “Play!” It comes quick as a shot, and is driven back with tenfold rapidity, and another shout rises high for the favourite batsman, though the ball was caught by one of the fieldsmen who faced it, with so sure an aim and so true a spring, that you would scarcely be astonished to see him stop and catch a ball fired from a cannon. A slower ball is next delivered by the bowler, who deceived all eyes but the batsman’s, from whom there is no disguising his play, so well is he able to measure the speed of the ball from the very tick of time that it is first delivered. And yet these are but every-day players, and, beyond the limits of their own village not the name of one of them is known as a cricket-player.

Ah! I have seen this game played many a time as it ought to be on Nottingham Forest; for who has not heard of the Nottingham Cricket-Players, whose exploits have rung through all England? Such batters and bowlers as I never expect to look upon again. Well did the fieldsmen know their distance when a first-rate batsman went in; and ample range they gave him, for they knew that the ball, when struck by such a powerful arm, would fly off like a cannon-shot. What stumping out and bowling out have I seen on that forest!

Oh! it is a noble game ; and as for exercise, none better can be found. But I need not here enter fully into the particulars of the game, for they are recorded in the “ Boys’ Own Book ;” and any description of mine would be but a repetition of what is already well told. Few, I imagine, can see this game played without feeling pleasure whilst looking on. The eager interest of the contending parties, the watchful eye and ever-ready hand, the foot planted to an inch, the distance run in such quick measured strides, give life and animation to the scene. The white dresses of the Cricketers, too, form a pleasing contrast to the green landscape; and the deep hum of so many voices bespeaks the great interest which they take in the game. What grace there is in their motions ; what symmetry displayed in their limbs, as they run, bowl, or strike, unencumbered by any superfluous drapery ! It is well worthy of its appellation, and is deservedly called the Noble Game of Cricket.

Just observe those sawyers at work in the sawpit—see how soon they cut down a large deal—how true they keep to the chalked marks, the man in the pit having a line drawn to guide him as well as the man above—watch the clean saw-dust as it falls, smooth as snow, though not so white—see the great piles of timber that stand piled round everywhere ; planks for floors, and for roofs, joists, and centre-beams, and huge trees full of knots, and the beautiful bark on them, covered here and there with such rich-coloured and velvet-looking moss. Oh, it sometimes smells like being in the midst of pleasant greenwood.

Old Dicky, one of the sawyers, is too aged to work now : he was a funny fellow, so kind to us boys ; and once, when they were repairing a large sewer, which went under the theatre, Dicky and his mate were sent for to take the measure, and prop up the floor above, with strong beams of wood brought from their saw-yard, for the place was considered dangerous. “ Now,” said Dicky, at night, when they had done sawing and fitting

in the beams, and making all secure, "Now, my lads, if you've a mind to go into the theatre for nothing to-night, you can; for there's a hole open which leads into the pit, and I left a short ladder there; it will bring you out just under where the fiddler sits, so you can pop up, one at a time, sit down where you like, and the money-takers will be none the wiser." Well, we thought this a capital chance to see the performance for nothing; and the theatre was no sooner open than down the sewer nearly half a score of us went like so many rats. We had a good way to go in the dark before we reached the ladder which Dicky had told us of, but we did reach it, and one after another got into the pit; but such a parcel of dirty, black, slimy little fellows as we were, you never saw in your life, for we had gone knee-deep through the black filth, which had, perhaps, never been disturbed for nearly a century. We sat down, however, black and covered with slime as we were. But the odour we had brought with us was unbearable. "What an unpleasant smell!" exclaimed one. "Sit further off!" cried another. And, what was worse than all, a score or more boys beside ourselves had learnt the secret, and kept bobbing up, and into the pit, about every minute or so, some of them having tumbled down in the sewer. A pit full of sweeps would have been more welcome companions. At last we were found out; the first act was over, down fell the curtain, and into the pit came the manager, and out we were bundled quicker than ever we came in. But what was worse than all, we rubbed against several boys who really *had* paid. But all in vain were protests and exclamations; the marks of the sewer were found upon them, and out they went along with the guilty. Never did a merry farce draw down more roars of hearty laughter than was heard in the old theatre that night; nay, if even the innocent boys who had unconsciously rubbed against us, only smelt of the kennel, they were bundled out with us; and, what was worse than all, when we got out-

side, there was old Dicky, the sawyer, laughing at us; and to this day we believe it was he who told the manager, and who sent down all the dirty boys he could muster after us, and all Dicky said was, "You should have filled your pockets with sawdust, my lads, and given yourselves a good scrubbing on the ladder, then they would never have noticed you." And often afterward he twitted us, and asked us how we liked the play of "A Night in the Sewer, or the Black and White Rat-catchers who were caught in their own trap." Still we liked old Dicky, although he played us off such a dirty trick, and I believe it cured us from ever trying to steal into the theatre again without paying. Then we had another trick. It was too bad, but it made us laugh heartily, and what will not boys do for fun? We used to get a large-headed nail, which was as big as a sixpence, and file the top until it was as smooth and bright as silver, then thrust it tight down between the nick of two slabs on the pavement. First one would come by, then another, all believing it was a real sixpence; and when they stooped down with an intent to pick it up, lo! it was immovable, and then we were watching round the corner, and ready to laugh at every one we took in. One or two whom we had before deceived would take out their pocket-knives and carry off the nail, saying, "Good lads, this will come in useful some day or another." Then we slunk off, looking very sheepish, for the big-headed nail had cost some one of us a halfpenny. So you see the laugh in the end was always against us, as it ought to be with all who try to deceive people.

What sport we used to have at this time in running, leaping, swinging, and trying to outrival each other in all these and many other similar feats! Every boy who knows anything about leaping, or jumping, knows what a cat-gallows is. You get two sticks with a few knots, or short projecting branches on them, and then you stick them into the ground, about a yard asunder. Then you place a slender

stick across them, almost like the letter H, only you are able to raise or lower the cross-bar, according to the knots or ends of the branches, just as you think you can manage to clear it without knocking down the slender stem which is laid across. If you have jumped over it at a certain height, perhaps the next boy, who has also gone over it, will raise it higher; if he clears it you must follow him; if you also leap clean over, you must then raise it to the next stem, and you will be astonished to see how well you can jump after a few days of such practice; for there is no danger in it; you cannot hurt yourself; the slightest touch, and down goes the slender bar which is laid lengthwise across. After such trials as these, you then begin to venture at a stoup-and-rail fence; you must look to your shins while leaping over, for this is very different to the other; here all is hard, rugged, and substantial, and the safest way is to measure the height first, by standing beside the barrier; for you ought to know to an inch, by this time, how high you are able to jump. Either go over with full confidence at once, or give it up. If you once begin to waver and doubt, ten to one you graze your shins, and get laughed at by your more courageous companions. If you think you cannot clear it, confess and give in at once; you will save your bones by it, and all the other boys can say will be that they are better jumpers than you are. Leap-frog every boy knows how to play at, and he should be careful to hold his head well in whilst "making a back;" but this is better exercise for cold weather than the hot months of summer. "Stag out" was a noble game for those who could run well. There was the Forester to see fair play; all the boys beside, saving the one who was the stag, were hounds, and their station was called the kennel. The boy who played the stag had a certain distance given him in advance, before the Forester cried "Stag out," which was the signal for the hounds to start. Whoever caught him first was the next stag. Still

HERON.

there was a spot called "the covert," and if the stag could regain that without being caught, he was lord of the forest again. Our forest, be it remembered, had its boundaries, and beyond these neither hart nor hounds must run.

You see that long-legged, sharp-beaked bird, with a splendid plume of long, black, glossy feathers on his head, which look like the sable crest of a helmet; that is the



HERON,

who delights to wade up to his body in the water, and stick his sharp bill into the first fish that happens to swim near him. He is none of your sleepy-headed birds, who go to roost at sunset with his head under his wing; but will turn out on a fine moonlight night, like a thorough angler as he is, and pick up whatever he can catch, from a bleak up to a barbel; for, thin as he is, he has a most voracious appetite. The heron, like the rook, builds its nest on the trees; and

at one period there were a great number of heronries in England, and a few are still said to exist in Windsor Great Park; on the skirts of Bagshot Heath; near Beverley, in Yorkshire; and several other places. When hawking was so popular an amusement amongst the nobility of this country, the penalty for killing a heron was twenty shillings, or three months' imprisonment, unless the bird was captured by flying a hawk at it, or destroyed by the long-bow. In former times this bird was called a heronshaw; and there is an old adage still existing, often applied to a stupid person who cannot comprehend anything clearly, which says, that "he would not know a hawk from a handsaw;" the latter word being a corruption of heronshaw. The heron builds a slovenly-looking nest, formed of sticks placed crosswise, and lined with grass or rushes, with a thin covering of feathers or wool. Sometimes the rooks and herons have been known to wage war for the possession of the trees to build in; and the battle has terminated with loss of lives, and many wounded on both sides, though victory at last alighted upon the plumed heads of the herons, who compelled the rooks to abandon the trees, fly further off, and found a new colony. It is also on record, that when the heron has been closely pursued by the hawk, and found he could not escape, he has made a sudden descent, turning himself upon his back as he sank downwards, so that when his pursuer alighted upon him, the sharp bill of the heron pierced through the body of the hawk. The heron may be often found standing, with one leg drawn up, by the sides of rivers and fish-ponds, where he watches for hours together, silently, and patiently for his prey.

Looking at that heron has recalled an old schoolfellow—I think I see him now, bringing the heron home under his arm, and turning it loose on his mother's clean house-floor, where it went striding about, and everywhere left the marks of its dirty feet, until the poor old lady got into such a rage

that she drove it out of the door, and over the houses it flew, and was never seen again.

Whilst young, as you are now, fresh faces will have fresh charms ; but when you grow older, you will often, like me, think of the companions of your youthful days, and recall the many happy hours you have passed with those who, since then, perhaps are dead. Such companions I once knew, and one of them, named Billy Maiden, whose memory has been recalled by the heron, I shall long remember : oh, he was a fellow full of fun, made rhymes, riddles, and all sorts of “ non-sensitives,” which you could not help laughing at if you tried ever so. I shall never forget one puzzling question which he used to put to us about a fox, three geese, and a basket of oats, and how a ferryman had to take them over the river, one at a time. Now, you know, if he took the fox over first (Billy would say), the geese would be sure to eat up the oats ; if he took the geese over first, why then he must either fetch the fox or the oats next ; if the fox, why it would kill the geese ; if the oats, he was just where he started, for the geese would eat them up whilst he went back again for the fox. Well, the old ferryman did not know what to do, until at last a bright thought came across his mind all at once ; and away he went, across the river, with the three geese, leaving the fox with the oats ; the next journey he carried the fox over, and brought back the three geese, which he left on the opposite side, and went across with the oats ; these he left once more with the fox, and then fetched the geese again. So you see he was compelled to make an extra trip, or else either lose the geese or the oats ; and he used always to conclude his story by saying, “ Better do a thing well, if it takes you a little longer, than badly, and have to do it all over again, and perhaps be a loser into the bargain.” For Billy mostly ended with a moral. He used to boast that he could talk dog-latin, and puzzled us very much at first by his method of linking three or four

words together; such as “infirtaris, intimberaleis, instraw-cornis, inoaknoneis,” which, by his rapid manner of pronunciation, had certainly a most awful Latin sound, but which, when pronounced slowly, though certainly not the most intelligible English, simply signified that “in fir tar is, in timber ale is, in straw corn is, in oak none is;” such was Billy’s translation of his own dog-latin. Then he pretended to make poetry too; but oh, such poetry! bless you, it was none of his own after all, although he pretended it was such; as,—

“Coffee and Tea
S—O—L—D.”

the D of course rhyming to Tea, and the names of the four letters forming the last line. Then his rhymes!—

“Sing, oh sing, ye heavenly Muses,
While I mends my boots and shoeses.”

On the death of a kitten, only two days old, was better,—

“My days on earth they were so small,
I wonder why I came at all.”

He made a couplet on our old schoolmaster, when a boy, for which he got soundly thrashed; and he used often jokingly to say, that he was more successful than many young authors, for he got *paid* for his first article. Our schoolmaster’s name was Flint, and he had a cast in his eye. Billy could not resist making a couplet, and thus it ran:—

“Old Daddy Flint, with his squint, sees double;
And if one boy laughs, two are sure to get into trouble.”

Then he used to have such droll questions, and ask us, “how the first hammer was made;” and wagging his fore-finger quickly, he would say, “Can you do this, and hold your finger still?” These things seem very silly now, but they made us laugh heartily when we were boys. When he wanted to get us out to play on a moonlight night, he used to sing an

old stanza in the street, which I doubt not our forefathers chanted before us :—

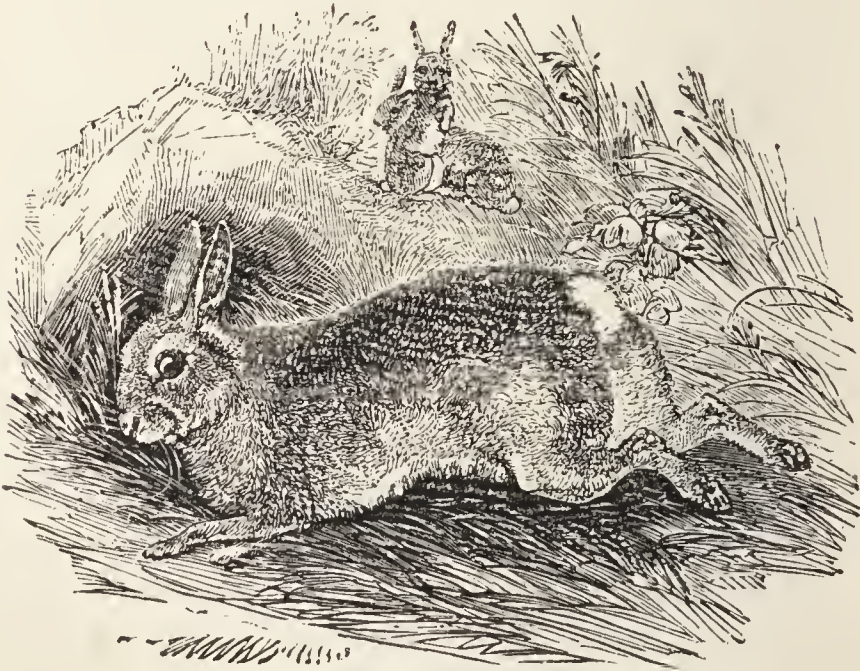
“Lads and lassies, come out to play,
The moon it shines as bright as day ;
Come with a whoop, come with a call,
Come with a good will, or don't come at all.”

Poor fellow, his was a melancholy end!—his giddiness and light-heartedness were the cause of his death. He was sitting, one summer evening, with his legs outside the head of the boat, repeating his quaint rhymes and odd sayings, and making us all laugh instead of attending to what we ought to have done, when the tide, or heygre (which I have before described), came upon us unawares, washed him away, half-filled the boat with water, and we never again saw him alive. Peace to his memory ! he was beloved by us all.

School-days are said to be the seasons when friendships are formed ; but it is not so : the boy we loved is too often another being when he grows up to manhood. Never, however, shun your old companion, because he is poor, and not so fortunate as yourself ; for no one can foresee the changes which may take place in this life. Never refuse his hand in after days, though it may be hardened by labour, and tanned by toil, unless he has sullied his fair name by dishonest and shameful deeds ; for there is no manliness in petty pride ; you may be richer than he is, but not a bit the better man for that ; if you are wealthier, he will feel himself all the more honoured by your recognising him, and the pleasure will be mutual, for poverty oftener warms the heart than chills it—old friendships are its only solace ; and whatever other books may tell you, believe me, things are not as they were ; a man must have something beside riches nowadays, to make himself beloved. The time is at hand when people will not run a mile to see a duke, or if they do, they will go home, like old Betty Cawthre, and say, “Why it was only a man after all !” Stars and garters

are not looked upon as they were in former days, for they are but the workmanship of man: a good name is better than a thousand such foolish and childish baubles as these; and Howard, the philanthropist, did more good for his fellow-men than all the Wellingtons that ever fought. I hate to see a parcel of English boys gather around another, and pay him homage, because some day or another he will be richer than they are ever likely to be. Protect a weak boy, a poor boy, one who has nobody to stick up for him—this is true nobleness; but the other is mean, selfish, and not honourable. I should like to put true English hearts into you: manly feelings, noble thoughts, a contempt for everything sordid, base, mean, vicious, and selfish, and make you feel that you will some day be called upon to play your part on the stage of the great country that gave you birth.

But see, there runs a



WILD RABBIT

under the fern and between the gorze, and it is by this time concealed in its sandy burrow beside the wood. Nay, it is

no use chasing it; I saw the white tail as it ran into its hole. You may always tell a rabbit from a hare, by the shortness of its head and the grey colour of the back. I love to sit on a green bank on a sunshiny day, and watch the young rabbits playing together on an open sandy warren, they do so run and jump; but if they once catch sight of you, off they go, and are out of sight in less than a minute. You would scarcely credit the number of rabbits that are produced in a season; and were it not that they fall a prey to so many birds and animals, and are also destroyed for food by man, they would soon devour everything that is green and eatable for miles around. You all of you know what tame rabbits are; and there are but very few boys who have not kept rabbits at one time or another; and I dare say you have often noticed how fond they are of scratching up the earth, if ever they can find a soft place—for although they were born in a hutch, and never in their lives saw either a heath or a warren, nor were ever taught to burrow in the earth; yet their natural instinct teaches them to try: and no doubt, were they turned loose on a warren, they would soon become diggers and delvers, like their wild companions.

Hitherto I have only given a passing glance at a few of our favourite summer flowers; and to make you better acquainted with them I must take a close survey, which I have no doubt will be both instructive and amusing to you all. First I will begin with the beautiful blue forget-me-not, which is to be found by the side of streams, and, like the water-lily, springing out of the water. When once you have seen it you will always know it again; it is a species of scorpion-grass, in shape resembling the primrose, although ten times smaller, and the clear yellow spot in the centre forms a beautiful contrast to the rich blue by which it is surrounded. Its very name is pleasing, and it is often enclosed in letters, and sent from one friend to another; for what can

SUMMER.

be a more poetical and delicate representative of affection than a pretty wild flower called the forget-me-not? I have before mentioned the convolvulus, or bind-weed; so called from its twining around everything it can touch; even the very grass in the fields is wreathed with the little pink convolvulus, the smell of which is delightful; and I know but few things that look prettier than that handsome flower, winding around two or three ears of corn; and there are but few flowers that can be twined into such beautiful forms; and sometimes you may come unaware upon a group of children who are busy making themselves belts, and scarfs, and coronals, and wreathing into a hundred fantastic forms every convolvulus they can seize upon whilst



GATHERING WILD FLOWERS,

and attiring themselves with the long strings of the red and white convolvulus with which the hedges are netted and curtained over. I must also tell you that all these climbing plants do not twine the same way; many wind round from left to right, others again from right to left; thus the bryony

and the bind-weed both turn different ways, one towards the sun and the other from it; nor will they coil any other way, twine them and tie them as you may, but if forced against their nature speedily droop away and die. Sometimes the large white convolvulus will cover the whole face of the hedge where it grows, and lead you to think that it was from the hedge itself such handsome flowers sprung: the leaves, which are heart-shaped, are almost as beautiful as the flowers. You have all seen the handsome blue convolvulus, starred with white, that grows so commonly in our gardens; and if you have paid close attention to it, you must have observed that it closes its bell, and “goes to bed,” that is, shuts itself up, about four o’clock: and there are a number of flowers which close at certain hours, and are as regular as the clock, and you might tell the time of day to a few moments by noting down the particular periods at which they fold themselves up. The scarlet pimpernel, which grows so common in the corn-fields, always closes before rain, and is called in the country the shepherd’s warning and the little weather-glass: it is of a beautiful bright scarlet colour, and as pretty a wild flower as ever grew. Another slender and graceful flower, which we often meet with in the open heath, or on banks sheltered by the hedges, is the blue and delicate harebell, in form so light and slender that the least breeze which blows causes its azure cups to wave. In many botanical works the harebell is described as having round leaves, and those who have gathered it, and found upon it long bladed grass-like foliage, have concluded that they must be mistaken in the flower, although, if they had examined it closely on its first appearance, they would find these rotund-shaped leaves growing upon the bottom of the stem; but these fade and die away as the plant attains its full growth, and bursts out into bloom. Neither is it an uncommon occurrence to find the leaves which spring

around the roots of several flowers varying from those which shoot out higher up the stem. Every boy knows the beautiful rose-coloured mallow, for there is scarcely a bank in summer that is not adorned with it, although the spot is often divested of almost all other vegetation; country children gather the seeds, and call them cheese-cakes, and you may often see a group of lusty children at a cottage door, with a pinafore full of these flattened cakes, playing at "feasting."

There are no words in the English language which bring before the "eye of the mind" sweeter associations than those of home and flowers. They both recall the age of childhood, and when we become men the pleasures of their remembrance is still dwelt upon with unabated joy. We never forget the flowers that

"Do paint the meadows with delight,"

as Shakspeare has happily said. And perhaps, in our childish days, we thought oftener about the flowers, than we did of any other objects in the country, even as Wordsworth, who is a beautiful writer of poetry, did, and who has said,—

"For oft when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

The lines printed in Italics mean the thoughts; which you all know can recall distant objects, and remembered scenes, and bring them so clearly before the mind, that our fancy can see them, even to a stile, a tree, a cottage—the form of the very garden-bed, and the faces of our friends, although they are hundreds of miles away.

I have only pointed out a few of the commonest flowers which you will meet with during a summer walk, not fearing but that when you have gathered and examined these, you will

be tempted further by the beauty and delicacy of scores of others which I have not named, and which you will gladly dig up and transplant to your little gardens, in order that they may recall the pleasant places you have visited in your rambles ; and while you watch them fade and wither, you will think how differently they looked in those wild sweet nooks where the profuse hand of Nature had originally scattered them. When we look on a landscape in the distance, and see the rich and refreshing green of the trees and fields, we involuntarily exclaim, “ Oh ! how beautiful ! ” but when we wander among the grass, and explore the banks, and see almost every spot dotted with hundreds of wild flowers, we are struck with astonishment at the wonder-working hand of Nature, and gaze in admiration at the beautiful effects the seasons produce. We feel that some great and unseen Power has been at work here ; and we need no other instructor than the reason which we are gifted with, to tell us that all these marvellous productions were formed by His mighty hand, who created all things in heaven and on the earth.

Nor do His marvels end here. In the deep unexplored chambers of the ocean are hidden hundreds of wonderful things which the eye of man hath not yet seen ; and it is only now and then that some buried object becomes revealed, as if to show us how little we know of what hath yet to come. Spots of earth which have slept undisturbed for ages are dug up, and we discover the skeletons of extinct animals which have never inhabited the earth in the memory of man, nor been met with alive in the remotest spots which ever human foot hath traversed. Huge turtles, and far-stretching lizards, and gigantic mastodons—monsters that swam, and bellowed, and shook the ground, long before we can trace any record or vestige of man. We find the remains of fishes on the summits of high hills, and under the beds of deep rivers the bones of unknown animals ; the tusks of the wild boar, the teeth of the

elephant, are mingled with the remains of the wolf, and found in many a wild spot excavated by the geologist, whose explanations only puzzle us the more, as he endeavours in vain to show how they came together : and these remains are found in the very England in which we now live. They tell us how this island was once covered with the ocean ; that the sea settled down, and then dry land appeared, covered with a vegetation that bears but little resemblance to that which we now see ; that strange creatures swam across from neighbouring shores, and lived upon it for ages ; and then large portions of the land were again submerged beneath the waves. And so the land accumulated, layer upon layer, earth upon earth—the growth of unrecorded centuries—the silent work of age upon age, before the voice of man ever broke the awful stillness of that vast solitude.

Flowers again whichever way we turn ! but my book will be filled with descriptions of nothing else, if I stop to describe a twentieth part of those we pass. How beautiful looks that tall chestnut-tree, with its grand cone of flowers, tapering upward to a starry point ; what a delicious shade its broad green leaves make ; and what a deep murmuring is ever kept up by the golden-belted bees, as they plunge into its fragrant blossoms. That beautiful deep lilac-coloured flower, which you see growing amongst the wheat, is commonly called the corn-cockle. What a grace there is in those five long green points which branch out at every angle of the petals : you might fancy that they were spears pointed by unseen fairy hands, to protect the beauty of the flower. Beside it grows the large ox-eye daisy, with its broad golden crest, which looks as if set within a star of silver, forming a beautiful contrast to the deep scarlet of the poppy, which hangs its silken head like a folded banner, that droops motionless on the air. But we must pass by the beautiful blue-bottle, whose rich tint appears to greater advantage beside the paler peach of the corn-cockle.

What a strange-looking scarecrow have they planted in the centre of this corn-field ! Saw ye ever a human figure like the one they have attempted to form out of the old ragged blue coat, crownless hat, and two odd gaiters ; all stuffed with straw no doubt by the bird-boy himself, whose clapper and cry we hear from the hedge-side, under which he is now sheltering, instead of getting up, and beating about with his long pole to scare away the crows. Bloomfield, in his beautiful poem entitled the " Farmer's Boy," gives an admirable description of the



BIRD-BOY TENTING THE CORN,

and falling asleep while the "sparrows drop one by one" from the hedge amongst the wheat. You almost wonder how

the little fellow manages to pass away the day by himself, amid the solitude of these fields, and yet I doubt not but what he finds amusement enough in chasing the young birds which have but just begun to fly ; for, solitary as the life of the bird-boy may appear, he has always objects at hand, both to improve and amuse him. There is something wild and romantic in leading this lonely life in the fields, far removed as that boy is from either village or homestead. Above his head he sees the great grey clouds as they float silently along across the unbounded wilderness of the sky. Silent, save for the hoarse caw of the black rook, that flaps its wings, and floats like a spirit between earth and heaven ; around him rise tall majestic trees, and he looks on, wondering how many years they have taken to reach that giant height. Far away as he is from any road, and in the very heart of the extensive fields, from day to day, he hears no human sound but the singing of the birds and the murmur of the wild bee ; for miles around him the fields are shut in until the hay and corn harvest is over ; he sees the grey rabbits emerge from their burrows in the banks, and watches their young ones as they run in and out among the standing corn ; and he makes all kinds of curious snares, none of them will act, or catch them ; he peeps through some hole in the hedge, and watches the hares as they play together and chase each other through the long grass ; he mocks the cuckoo as she sings upon some distant tree, and sends back sound for sound over the silent landscape, for it is a treat to him to hear his own voice ; he rattles his wooden clapper until his arm aches, and sings the very song which was sung above a hundred years ago by his forefathers when they were boys and “ tented ” corn like him—and which we have heard scores of times during our summer rambles—as the sound rang upon the air, and floated over the landscape :—

Away, birds, away !
And come no more to-day ;

SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY.

Away, birds, away !
Take an ear, and leave an ear,
And come no more for seven long year ;
Away, birds, away !

A real summer sound is that merry bird-boy's ancient song ; and I can well remember the day when, wearing a little blue smock-frock and heavy ankle-boots, I sallied forth in the early morning into the green fields of Thonock, and wakened the sleepy echoes of Warton Wood, with my loud bird-clapper and noisy song, while Gip, the shepherd-dog, barked in chorus. A merry life did I lead in those days, for my uncle was a great good-natured farmer, who trusted me with his gun, never caring what I shot, so long as I did not shoot myself ; and when I had nothing else to fire at, I used to plant my brown napless hat upon some gate-post, and, if very lucky indeed, probably hit it one time out of ten. Oh ! what a proud day was that when I shot a great staring white owl, and carried it triumphantly into the old-fashioned farm-house ; my laurels, however, were somewhat fallen, when told by my kind-hearted aunt that it was a cruel deed to kill a poor inoffensive bird.

Alas ! alas ! every one seems to rest on the Sabbath but the poor bird-boy ; he must be at his post Sunday and all days alike, to prevent the birds from eating up the corn—poor little fellow, I pity him ! Let us walk farther until we are far beyond the sound of his clapper, to where a true Sabbath-like silence reigns. What a lovely prospect have we here ! for beautiful and tranquil as the country ever looks, compared to the deafening din and stifling smoke of cities, there is still a holier repose and calmer tranquillity hanging around it on the Sabbath, as if even Nature herself was resting in the midst of her works. A hallowed quietude seems to reign about the earth, the voices of the labourers are no longer heard in the fields—the creaking of the wagon, the cracking

of the whip, and the shouting of the driver are exchanged for the softened sound of the distant village-bells, that peal far and wide over the surrounding landscape, echoing from the wood, and reverberating from the steep hill-side, until dying away in their very faintness among hollow dells and hidden dingles. Far as the eye can reach you see rustic groups threading their way over many a winding footpath and broad high-road; along the wood, and across the hill, and out of the valley, they pour, in all kinds of picturesque costumes, and all journeying onward towards the same place,—to where the tall spire points its silent finger to the sky, as if beckoning them to that hallowed spot; there to kneel, where their grey forefathers before them have for ages knelt, at the footstool of the Almighty Creator. The village church seems to rise up like the temple of God in the midst of His own beautiful works,—for there are neither tall chimneys nor huge manufactories at hand to proclaim the power and triumph of man over labour, in the wonderful construction of machinery. All around you is primitive, simple, and pastoral. Those rustic worshippers move along with feelings which are almost unknown to the indwellers of cities, for their existence hangs upon the very changes of the elements,—they feel that they are approaching Him who hath power to hold or give the rain,—whose mighty hand can throw a shadow across the sunshine, and prevent its warmth and light from reaching the earth, “who sendeth seed-time and harvest,” and poureth His bounteous plenty over the land: they live under the eye of heaven,—the blue sky or the green leaves are ever above and around them; they are hemmed in with the works of God’s own hand, instead of the walled cities built by man.

On the Sabbath you seem to walk more alone amid His works; you no longer behold man there at his labour, though the flowers blow, the birds sing, and the bee goes on murmuring beside the river that pauseth not in its low sweet

song, yet even these sounds seem subdued, as if they felt the holy stillness which pervades the Sabbath. All around speaks of peace; whichever way you turn the eye you see some object which tells you that man has ceased from his labour,—the broad-wheeled wagon stands motionless in the shed, the edge of the sharp scythe is covered, and hung upon the wall, the horses move to and fro almost without a sound, for they are no longer cumbered by their jingling harness; even the very shepherd-dog lies coiled up in a corner, basking in the sunshine, as if he too knew that it was a day of rest; for a dreamy quietness seems to have settled down upon every field, farm, and homestead. You miss the noisy prattle of the village children in the green lanes, the whistling and singing of the elder ones as they went to and fro on their errands from field to farm—for they are gathered together under the slated roof of the humble Sunday-school; and at intervals (from the open windows) you catch the faint sound of some plaintive hymn, while they raise the song of praise which ascends unto Heaven. And on this day the poor labourer, who has passed the whole week amid the quiet and solitariness of the fields—leaving his cottage early in the morning, and returning to it again late in the evening to find his children asleep as when he left them, after being wearied with their long day's play—even he has the pleasure of seeing them one day out of seven, gathering round his table, and climbing upon his knees, and telling him about all the wonderful things they have seen and heard since the last Sabbath,—fondly asking him when it will be Sunday again, and hoping it will come soon that he may spend the whole day at home with them.

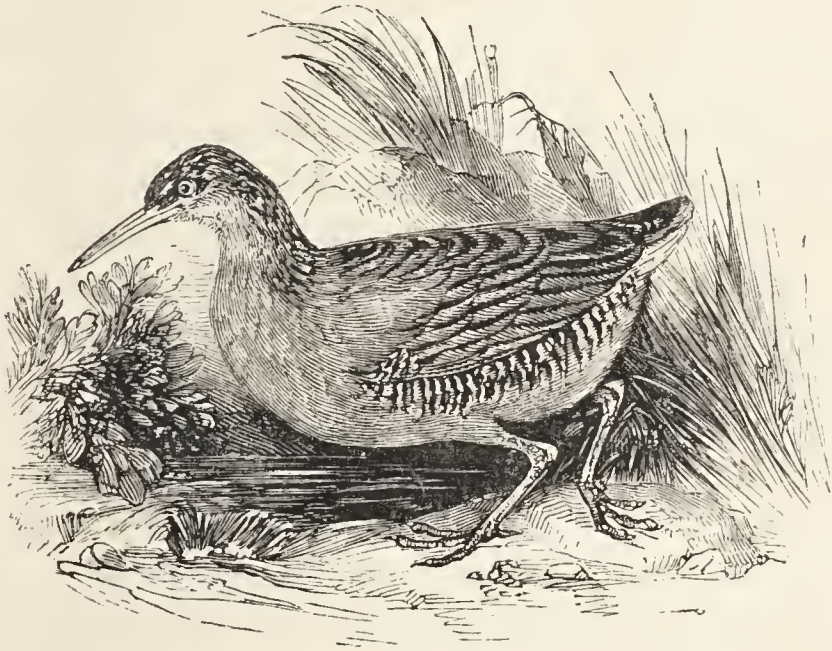
The very village seems to sleep in the still sunshine of the Sabbath—the air no longer rings with the heavy hammering of the blacksmith, his shop is closed, and the rustic gossip gone that leant for the hour together over the unlatticed

window-sill; the plane no longer whistles in the joiner's shed; around the wheelwright's door every axle is at rest, and you behold only the proud cock and his feathered dames scratching amongst the chips and shavings: if the children sit beside the village brook, you miss the little boat which was so great an object of interest to them, for it is put away somewhere until the following day; and all they have to amuse themselves with now is, to throw in a weed or a flower and watch it float silently away. The hoop is hung up in the shed, the kite on its accustomed nail behind the door, bats and balls are all taken away, the little barrow lies with its wheel uppermost at the bottom of the garden, the spotted wooden horse without its head is thrust underneath the seat in the summer-house, and the tiny cart, which is filled with new occupants from morning until night, the scene of many a squabble and many a kiss, has for one day found rest for its weary wheels.

In the woods you find the same Sabbath-like silence reign,—you no longer hear the sound made by the old fagot-gatherer as she snaps some fallen and rotten bough sharply asunder, before thrusting it into her huge bundle of sticks; you miss the noisy shouts of the boisterous bird-nesters, and no longer see their ragged figures diving in and out of the underwood as they examine bush after bush, and tree after tree. The axe of the woodman is silent. In the vast fields that slope down the hill-sides, dipping and stretching away to the very verge of the river, not a human figure is visible, unless it be some wandering pedestrian enjoying his solitary Sunday walk. Where but the day before you saw groups of men, and women, and children, busily employed in field-work, now nothing moves—their rakes and hoes and weeding-hooks are thrown together in a heap beside the hedge, there to await the coming morrow. Even on the river the boats are moored, just in the place where the last tide left them, for

WATER-CRAKE.

they have not moved a single length since the Sabbath-day settled down ; the angler has left its banks, and the rower has quitted his boat, the wheel of the water-mill is still ; and all you see of motion there is the willows swaying idly in the breeze, and the water-flags rocking to the rippling of the current, or the solitary



WATER-CRAKE,

which is a very scarce bird, and, like the bittern, fond of sheltering in marshy and reedy places ; for it can both swim and dive, but, like many a boy who has neither the courage nor the industry to master these necessary accomplishments, it prefers wading, and for this purpose chooses shallow water, where it feeds principally upon worms, slugs, and insects. Like the land-rail, it is a bad flyer, and seems to trust more to its legs than its wings ; it will also squat down in a similar manner to the former bird, to conceal itself ; and its hiding-place is very difficult to be found, unless sought out by dogs ; but to-day there is no one to disturb it. It generally builds in damp osier-beds, or in the midst of thick patches of water-

flags, forming its nest of coarse grass and reeds, in which it commonly lays six eggs, as white and spotless as the purest ivory. The upper part of the plumage is a brown olive interspersed with black; the under part ash colour, mixed with brown, while the sides are chequered with black and white feathers. Many who have seen it in the winter have mistaken it for the corn-crake, which they supposed to have changed its plumage in the autumn, not knowing that the land-rail migrates at that season.

But let us leave the river-side, and cross these fields and enter the weather-beaten gates of the old churchyard, for service is over, and the congregation are about to depart to their rural homes, many of which are two or three miles off, laying in lonely and out-of-the-way places, so remote that many of the neighbours only see each other when they meet at church, or at the neighbouring market-town; and what kind greetings and fond inquiries do we hear, of who is ill—who is well—who has gone away—who has returned—who is born—who is married—and who, also, is dead. There you see old age leaning on its staff and slowly spelling out some half-obliterated epitaph on a tombstone—a fond mother steps aside and pauses to look for a moment upon the grave of the lost daughter she so fondly loved, while her little son clings fondly to her gown, and innocently inquires when sister will come home again?—a father shakes hands with a son he has not seen for a long time, for he is out at place at a solitary farmhouse, miles away; and it is only now and then, when his master is kind enough to feed the cattle during his absence, that he can be spared to attend church, and partake of the homely meal under his father's roof. In a country churchyard even the very children know who was last buried: they miss the great farmer, in his blue coat and top-boots; they miss the few halfpence, also, which he used to throw amongst them, when they ran to open the heavy white-gate which, hung

upon the jaw-bones of a mighty whale, led to the high-road across the common. They wonder what has become of his strong black horse and the playful dog that used to leap up and lick their faces ; and so wondering they stand in silence beside his newly-made grave : for in a country village the inhabitant is soon missed from his accustomed place—there is a blank left—a vacant space that wants filling up—a something that moved, and spoke, and crossed their path almost every day, that amid the jostling and crowding of a great city might have glided into the grave unnoticed ; whilst in a village a painful void is left behind, for the place he knew forgetteth him not, until a whole generation is swept away.

Nor ought we ever to forget, that amid all the business and pleasure and enjoyment of this life, it is ordained that we once shall die,—that this earth is not our abiding place, but that there is another and a better world, where there is no sorrow, where friends are never again separated, where true happiness only exists, where not an evil feeling nor an evil thought can enter, and that if we “do unto others as we would they should do unto us,” avoid vice, and seek only to be virtuous, that if we do these things we shall be enabled to look upon death as a welcome sleep after the long day’s journey of life is done,—a sleep from which we shall awake to a brighter morning in a happier world.

Solemn and strange, on a summer Sunday evening, sounds the booming of the bittern in the twilight ; it is but fancy, yet after the hushed silence of so hallowed a day, the strange, droning, unearthly tones of that solitary bird seem to fall subdued upon the ear, especially if your walk is beside some low, swampy moorland, the bank which runs between a river and some damp rushy marsh, where the sound of the water comes with a low babbling “ribble-bibble” upon the shore, and every now and then the willows give a sharp rustle, and then again are still. At such times may often be heard, on a

summer evening, that loud, dismal, hollow kind of sound, as if a bull was buried in a bog, and bellowing to get out again,—for such is the noise made by the booming of the



BITTERN,

a bird which is not at all common in the present day, and is oftener heard than seen. The ignorant country people believe that it produces this sound by thrusting its head under the water, or by forcing its long pointed bill into a hollow reed ; but the truth is, its windpipe is peculiarly constructed : it can draw in at once a large quantity of air, and, by the aid of its powerful lungs, drive it out again at pleasure ; and by this means it produces this loud, wild, unearthly sound. The bittern is a beautifully marked bird, principally covered with a pale yellow plumage dotted with endless variegated spots

A SUMMER EVENING.

and deep streaks of black. It builds a coarse nest of sedge and water-plants, in which it lays four or five light olive-green coloured eggs. It is but seldom seen in the day-time, as it then hides amongst the reeds and sedges in the low lands and marshes, from whence it commences its loud booming call in the evening. It lives upon fish, frogs, insects, lizards, and snakes, when they chance to come in its way. It never flies far at a time when it is started from its hiding-place ; and when only slightly wounded by the sportsman, it will courageously attack the spaniel that dares to capture it. Southey makes mention of the bittern in one of his poems, and says,

“At evening, o’er the swampy plain,
The bittern’s boom came far.”

Still there is ever something calm and beautiful about the repose of evening ; and as I have not hitherto introduced much poetry into my book, I must here insert a few verses, which I wrote several years ago, descriptive of

A SUMMER EVENING.

Another day, with mute adieu,
Has gone down yon untrodden sky ;
And still it looks as clear and blue
As when it first was hung on high :
The sinking sun, the darkening cloud,
That drew the lightning in its rear,
The thunder, trumping deep and loud,
Have left no footmark there.

The village-bells, with silver chime,
Come softened o’er the distant shore ;
Though I have heard them many a time,
They never rang so sweet before—
A silence rests upon the hill,
A listening awe pervades the air ;
The very flowers are shut, and still,
And bowed as if in prayer.

SUMMER.

And in this hush'd and breathless close,
O'er earth, and air, and sky, and sea,
A still low voice in silence goes,
Which speaks alone, great God, of Thee—
The whispering leaves, the far-off brook,
The linnet's warble fainter grown,
The hive-bound bee, the homeward rook,
All these their Maker own.

Now shine the starry hosts of light,
Gazing on earth with golden eyes :
Bright sentinels that guard the night,
What are ye in your native skies ?
I know not ! neither can I know,
Nor on what leader ye attend,
Nor whence ye came, nor whither go,
Nor what your aim nor end.

I know they must be holy things
That from a roof so sacred shine,
Where sounds the beat of angel wings,
And footsteps echo all divine.
Their mysteries I never sought,
Nor hearkened to what science tells,
For oh ! in childhood I was taught
That God amidst them dwells.

The deepening woods, the fading trees,
The grasshopper's last feeble sound,
The flowers just wakened by the breeze,
All leave the stillness more profound.
The twilight takes a deeper shade,
The dusky pathways darker grow,
And silence reigns in glen and glade,
While all is mute below.

And other eves as sweet as this
Will close upon as calm a day,—
Then, sinking down the deep abyss,
Will, like the last, be swept away,

HEDGEHOG.

Until eternity is gained,—
The boundless sea without a shore,
That without time for ever reigned,
And will when time's no more.

Now nature sinks in soft repose,
A living semblance of the grave ;
The dew steals noiseless on the rose,
The boughs have almost ceased to wave ;
The silent sky, the sleeping earth,
Tree, mountain, stream, the humble sod,—
All tell from whom they had their birth,
And cry, "Behold a God !"

Do you know what that is you just kicked aside with your foot ? Some great, dead, prickly cone, say you ? Not at all : it is a live



HEDGEHOG,

whose only safety when danger is at hand, is in rolling itself up into that round, impenetrable ball. Nay, there is no making him unroll unless he pleases ; and I can tell you, it must be a courageous dog to worry him. But it would be cruel to set a dog on such an inoffensive animal. Rolling must hurt it, and, no doubt, cause the spines to press

heavily upon the skin. I remember keeping one when a boy, which I fed upon bread, milk, meat, or anything which chanced to be at hand. Its usual food is insects, snails, worms, frogs, toads, and mice, and it will even attack and devour a snake, which it will give a sharp bite on the back, and then coil itself up again in an instant. After having waited a short time, the hedgehog will again unroll itself, and give the snake another bite, then as quickly form itself again into a round ball of prickly spines; and so it will go on, opening and shutting, biting and coiling itself up, until it has broken the snake's back, when it will begin at the tail and eat upwards and upwards until the whole of the snake is devoured. Its favourite feeding time is in the night, and it is very fond of hiding in some dark corner during the daytime. It sleeps through the whole of the winter. It is considered a great destroyer of black-beetles, and is often kept for that purpose. The young, like kittens and puppies, are born blind, and there are generally from three to five in a litter. By some they are reckoned excellent eating; and I once came upon a gipsy camp, and saw the gipsies roasting two hedgehogs over the wood fire. They offered me a portion of one to taste of; but I declined, more from fancy than anything else, for the smell was the same as that which arises from roast pork; and they assured me that an "urchin" (for so they named a hedgehog) was superior to the finest sucking-pig that was ever eaten. But fancy goes a long way; and I dare say, when any of you have read of the Chinese eating little fat puppy-dogs, you would rather have fasted than dined with them; and yet they are fattened and sold as commonly in the markets of China, as rabbits and hares are in England.

There is always some amusing story or another to be found in a country village, for every one there knows his neighbour; and if there are any odd traits to be laughed at amongst the cottagers, they are soon picked out, and furnish matter for

the gossips for miles around ; and I will tell you a merry tale which I heard in the vale of Glentworth, of a man who thought that he was more hardly dealt with than anybody else. He was a queer dissatisfied sort of a fellow, who was always a grumbling, and finding fault with his wife when he came home, if everything was not in "apple-pie order," although everybody but himself knew that a better managing little woman could not be found, if he searched every corner of the country. He never came home but what he growled like a dog with a sore throat ; if he had to wait five minutes for his dinner, he complained that nothing was ever ready for him ; if it was ready a few minutes before the time, he murmured and said that all the goodness was stewed out of it ; if she was busy and did not enter at once into conversation with him, he said she was sulky ; if she was chatty, and made herself agreeable, her tongue was running like the clatter of a mill-dam ; in short, do whatever she might, she never did right. "I am compelled to work," he would often say, "from morning to night ; as to you, you've only got the house to look after, and my meals to get ready, and what is that ? why, nothing at all." He was deaf to all she had to say about looking after the children, attending to their little dairy (for they kept one cow), feeding the pigs, washing, and keeping the garden in order ; all of which he said was nothing compared with what he had to do, and that he should like to change places with her, were it only for one day, then she would soon see the difference. The latter hint he had thrown out many a time, and one evening during the hay-harvest, after having run over his usual catalogue of complaints, great was his astonishment to hear her exclaim that she would change situations with him on the morrow ; that she had stood foremost amongst the hay-makers when she was single, and, as he had so often challenged her, she would go out to work in the fields, while he staid at home and looked after the household affairs, and then she should see what *he* could do.

So the arrangement was made between them, and as the hay-field was near at hand she was to come home to dinner. Noon-day came, and with it the wife home, as she had promised, her temper cheerful as ever, and her cheek already tanned by the heat of the sun : and great was her surprise, instead of seeing dinner upon the table, to find the fire extinguished, and the floor flooded with water. He had been making broth, the pot had boiled over, and, a very natural consequence, the chimney had taken fire, the result of which was no dinner was forthcoming that day. In his hurry to extinguish the fire, he had left wide open the garden-gate while he went to and fro to fetch water from the well ; and anxious to have dinner ready early that he might have something to boast about, he had forgotten to feed the pigs, and they, never before having had to fast for so long a period, had broken out of the sty, and entered the garden, where two of them had helped themselves to whatever they could find green, and the third had tumbled head-foremost into the uncovered well. The eldest boy had been tempted by a penny to show a tinker all his mother's hen-roosts, and the gipsy tinker had walked off with every egg he could lay his hands on, besides carrying away three couple of her finest chickens ; nor was there a garment left upon the garden hedge, although she had left it in the morning covered with lawn as white as driven snow ; and all this had been accomplished while her husband was busy in extinguishing the fire. The cow had also escaped from the shed, and was found locked up in a neighbouring pin-fold. Added to all this, he was drawing himself a draught of beer from the barrel in the dairy, when he was first alarmed by the cry of the children that the chimney was on fire, and in his eagerness to extinguish it, he rushed out without turning the tap, so that when his wife went to quench her thirst she found the barrel empty, and the dairy flooded ; the cat also, embracing so favourable an opportunity, had helped herself to the milk, and licked up all the cream, as clean as if it had been

skimmed, while the half of a raw leg of mutton, which stood on a dish beside the stool, had been carried away by the dog, who in his eagerness to escape had upset the butter, and left it amongst the beer which flooded the floor. To mend matters, the children had upset the bee-hive, and besides getting stung, the whole of the honey was scattered upon the ground. Nor did this chapter of accidents end here. Having heard that the best way to extinguish a fire in a chimney, was to block up the pot with wet clothes, he had planted a ladder against the roof of the cottage, seized upon whatever came handiest, which was a washing-tub of wet clothes in the kitchen, and so had stuffed down the blazing chimney-pot his wife's best gown and the children's Sunday frocks, which having passed this ordeal of water, fire, and soot, as a matter of course, could never be worn again. The fire had frightened the pigeons from the dove-cote, and they never returned. Such was the home the wife found after only a few hours' absence in the hay-field, and which before had ever been so clean and comfortable, that you might have sat down upon the floor to have eaten your dinner, as the saying is. The husband never spoke a word, but sighing heavily, he took the hay-fork from her hand, and stalked off, dinnerless, to the hay-field. When he came home again in the evening all was put to rights as if nothing had happened, saving the loss of the pig and the pigeons, and from that hour he was never known to grumble again; for although his experience in domestic affairs had been of such short duration, it had cured him, and he never after proposed to exchange situations with his wife. Some of the neighbours say that the old moral of "Let everybody mind their own business," originated with him; but the saying is of much older date than my story.

Now is the time to look out for a squirrel's nest, if you wish to find the young ones in it; but it would be cruel to carry them away, for however much care and attention we might bestow upon them, we could never make them so com-

fortable as the old squirrels do, for they pay great regard to their young. But I should like to show you their nest, it is so beautifully made. The moss and leaves and the fibres of trees are interwoven so neatly together, that you might fancy a bird had built it; and sometimes it is found in a hole in the tree, or snugly embedded in some point where the branches shoot out, looking like a great knot or protuberance; so skilful is the squirrel in matching the colour of its nest with the bark that you might look up among the branches a dozen times without discovering it, unless you chance to start the old one from the spot; and this, I can tell you, is no easy matter, for you might shout and pelt a long while before it would move. You would be astonished to see the leaps which the



SQUIRREL

can take from one tree to another; sometimes when chased by boys, in its eagerness to escape, it will, while making a spring, fall upon the ground, and that is the moment to capture it, for should the squirrel once reach the root of an adjoining tree, he is up, over your head, and off again amongst the branches in an instant. It is curious to see it eat, sitting

SQUIRREL.

upon its haunches, and holding the food in its fore-paws like a monkey. Only give it a nut, and see how soon it will gnaw through the hard shell, being also very particular before eating the kernel to strip every bit of the brown skin off, before a morsel is swallowed. In its wild state it feeds upon young shoots, leaf-buds, acorns, nuts, beech-mast, and also makes sad havoc with the bark of young trees. It lays up provision for the winter, not only in its nest, but in any hole it may chance to find in the surrounding trees, having sometimes a dozen of these secret storehouses within a few leaps of its hiding-place; and sometimes the squirrels will build their nests in the same tree for years together. But here I cannot resist giving you a description of a squirrel-hunt, written by an old poet, named William Browne, above two hundred years ago:—

“——A nimble squirrel from the wood,
Ranging the hedges for his filbert-food,
Sits partly on a bough, his brown nuts cracking,
And from the shell the sweet white kernel taking:
When with their crooks and bags, a host of boys,
To share with him, come with so great a noise,
That he is forced to leave a nut nigh broke,
And for his life leap to a neighbouring oak;
Thence to a beech, thence to a row of ashes;
While through the quagmires, and red water splashes,
The boys run, dabbling on through thick and thin;
One tears his hose, the other breaks his shin;
This, torn and tattered, hath, with much ado,
Got through the briars—and that hath lost his shoe;
This drops his band, that headlong falls for haste;
Another cries behind for being the last:
With sticks, and stones, and many a sounding hollow,
The little fool with no small sport they follow;
Whilst he, from tree to tree, from spray to spray,
Gets to the woods, and hides him in his *dray*” [nest].

I forgot to tell you, whilst describing the old river-bed and the grebe, what a place it was for the



LAPWING, OR PEEWIT,

which naturalists have named the Green Plover ; although few of the country people, who live in the neighbourhood of its haunts, would know the Peewit by that name. It is a beautiful bird, with such a splendid plume of feathers upon its head ; and so richly marked, that although only looking as if it were black and white at a distance, yet when clearly examined, it is beautifully shaded with blue and purple and green, almost as rich as the colours in a dove's neck, where you can neither tell where the green begins, nor the blue and the purple end, so gorgeously are the hues blended when seen in a favourable light. Its motions in the air are very graceful. I have watched it for an hour together, and seen it make such sweeps and circles, now up, then down again, wheeling round, then flying afar off, to allure you from its nest, and all the time crying "pee-wit, pee-wit," loud or low, just as the wind bore the sound on the air, or as the shrill notes came softened by the distance. But what is most singular, it builds no nest, but lays its eggs (which are four in number) in any hole in the marshy ground ; and I have often found the eggs crushed, and the young ones killed,

by the heavy hoof of a bullock. The young peewits can run two or three days after they are hatched; and are sooner able to "pick up their living" than any bird I know, as they feed on worms and slugs and suchlike insects which all moist and marshy grounds abound in. When fully fledged, they are a great ornament to a garden, and look very beautiful with their fine feathery crests blowing about—and only let them once see a worm, and down the throat it goes in an instant! and some say that they are so cunning as to tap with their feet upon the ground, when the silly worm, mistaking the sound for that of the mole, creeps out of its hole to escape the enemy that it fancies is coming along underground, and so is gobbled up by the artful peewit, and, as the saying is, it "jumps out of the frying-pan into the fire."

Now, as the peewit is so useful in a garden in destroying insects, we could find plenty of customers for them when fully fledged, who would willingly give us a shilling for a nest of four young ones. But then, as I have told you, they can run soon after they are hatched, and hide themselves in any hole or corner, where they would be as still as mice, until we were gone; beside, if we had caught them while they were such poor little unfledged things, we could not have sold them. So the way we did was this, when we found a nest of young peewits, we used to fasten one end of a string to one of their feet, and peg the other end of it into the ground, so that they could not run far, and so we kept them prisoners, until they were big enough to become "gardeners," for you must remember they were not kept close prisoners, after we took them away, but had the whole of the garden to range in, so that they did not fare so badly after all, although we were compelled to keep their wings cut rather closely; and when they once became used to the place they would remain there for years, without ever attempting to escape, for they lived better there in winter than they would have done in a wild state.

There was once a man who used to gather peewits' eggs, and send them to the markets to sell (for plovers' eggs are reckoned by many fine eating). I forget what his name was, but we never knew him by any other than that of Peewit; and he used to delight us boys, by imitating the cry of the lapwing, which he could do so naturally, that you might have fancied it was the peewit itself you heard. Well, I must tell you, he sometimes drank more ale than did him good, and got what you may either call "fresh," tipsy, or drunk, so that he could not walk straight; and one dark night, whilst staggering home in this state, he chanced to thrust his elbow through a cottage window, when, instead of walking away, he began to cry out, "peewit, peewit," and then hid himself at the end of the cottage, and varying his voice, as he alone could vary it, whilst imitating the cry of that bird, until the poor simple people within looked out, and seeing no one there, actually believed that a peewit had flown against the window in the dark and broken it; for he was a good ventriloquist, and could make his voice sound as if it was a great distance off; nor would the secret ever have been discovered, had he not one night whilst at the alehouse divulged it himself. He was a very good-natured man, and when we used to call after him, "Peewit," he would answer, "Hey, hey!—my lads, peewit, peewit," and away he would go sounding "peewit" in such a variety of tones, that you might have fancied yourself wandering in the old river-bed, whilst a dozen different birds were answering one another; so shrill, loud, low, distant, and near at hand, did he seem to change his voice, as he walked along. Oh! what a garden full of peewits had he! many of them were several years old, and would come when he called, and eat out of his hand; then he had such droll names for them, such as Silver-lip, Tim Bobbin, Tommy-long-tuft, and one that was lame he called Betty Black, after a lame old woman who lived next door; and sometimes Betty and the bird would come hopping up together, then the old woman would say, "It's too bad of thee,

Peewit, that it is!" while Peewit only laughed at the joke—but he is dead now, poor old Peewit! Peace to his memory!

And now, my young readers, I have brought you to the close of Summer, for the silence of the birds in the fields, and the rustling of the white corn, which is already ripe for the sickle, tells me that Autumn is at hand, and through that "season of mists and yellow fruitfulness," it is my intention to conduct you in the next portion of this work, where, although we shall find fewer flowers than paved our pleasant Summer path, there will be no lack of objects of equal interest amid the many wonderful things which I yet hope to make you acquainted with. I will show you how Autumn opens her great garner-house, into which ten thousand orchards empty their fruit, and the yellow corn-fields pour forth their treasures; also how beautiful is that boundary line which Nature has drawn across the different seasons. Further on into the year I will advance, bringing the white and hoary Winter before you, with his "frost, and snow, and rime," and show you that amid all her changes Nature is ever beautiful, and that whatever object the eye lights upon harmonises with the scenery around—that even in the absence of green trees, and variegated flowers, she is still busy with her wonderful work, making preparations for the approaching Spring; and that when I have finished my labour, you will be in possession of a complete History of the Seasons, which will be of use to you in after-life—a key which will open the great Garden of Knowledge, and enable you more clearly to comprehend the many marvels which are to be found therein; that you will be better able to understand those valuable works which, from age to age, have been produced by wise and learned men, and to look back with pleasure upon the little book which first ushered you into this great world of wonders. I will tell you how many animals which cannot find food in the inclement season of winter, sleep secure and warm in their little nests, nor wake again until the approach of Spring, when

SUMMER.

Nature has provided for their wants ; of birds that leave us, and fly hundreds of miles over wide and perilous seas, seeking far-off shores, where summer still reigns, and returning to us again when our fields and woods are covered with leaves and blossoms; how the twitter of hundreds of assembled swallows, which congregate on the banks of our rivers, is a sure sign that the Summer has departed, and that when they are again seen skimming over our ponds and rivers, and perched upon the eaves of our houses, we know that “ the winter is past—the rain is over and gone—that the flowers again appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come ! ” For by such signs as these were the Seasons marked so far back as the days of King Solomon, and they were observed by Abraham when he pastured his cattle in the plains of Jordan. There are but few countries where the seasons follow each other in such beautiful succession as in our own, where such a distinct line is drawn between the division of Spring and Summer—Autumn and Winter ; and the growing and ripening, the gathering in and the decay of Nature, are all marked out in clear and comprehensive lines, and so strongly limned that the eye of the naturalist cannot mistake them. Where each Season is known by its particular flowers, by the singing or the silence of its birds, that blossom follows bud, the fruit the flowers, and that even the withered and the fallen leaves form a rich soil for the vegetation of the coming Spring : that when to our eyes Nature may seem to sleep, she is still busy in her silent and hidden work, and forming the buds which are again to put forth and hang up her Summer chambers with waving curtains of green.





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AUTUMN:—HARVEST TIME.







BEAUTY OF AUTUMN—PICTURE OF HARVEST; ANXIETY OF THE FARMER
GROUP OF GLEANERS; DESCRIPTION OF CORN REAPING; HARVEST-HOME;
STUBBLE-FED GEESE; THE FEAST OF HARVEST-HOME—BEAUTY OF WOODS IN
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ITS CURIOUS HABITS—OWLS IN THE FOREST—OUR NUTTING EXCURSION IN THE
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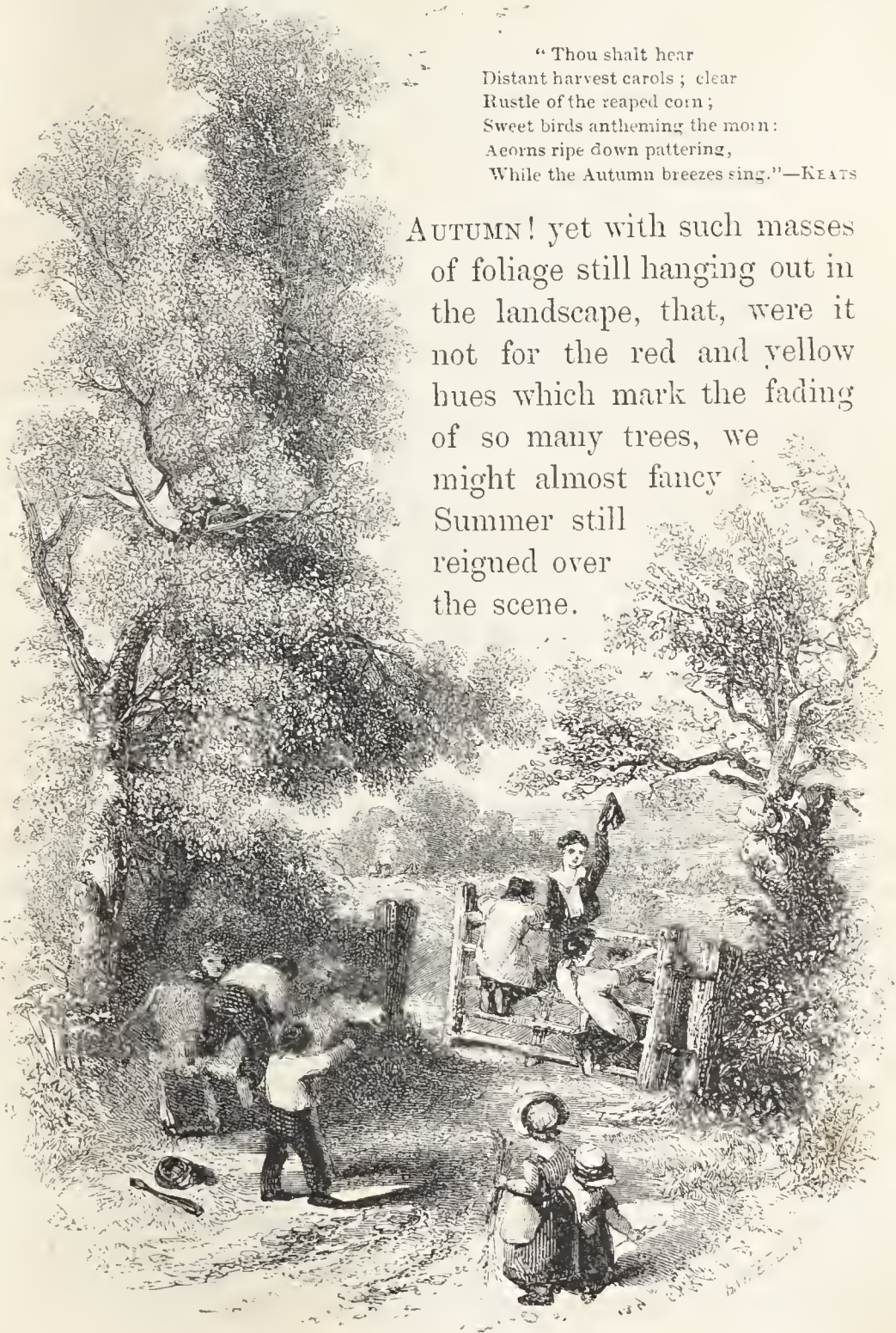
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"Thou shalt hear
Distant harvest carols ; clear
Rustle of the reaped corn ;
Sweet birds antheming the morn :
Acorns ripe down pattering,
While the Autumn breezes sing."—KEATS

AUTUMN! yet with such masses
of foliage still hanging out in
the landscape, that, were it
not for the red and yellow
hues which mark the fading
of so many trees, we
might almost fancy
Summer still
reigned over
the scene.



But the ears of corn which trail on the hedges in narrow lanes, the gates that here and there stand open, with children either swinging upon them, or clambering up to reach the straggling ears, which hang upon the boughs above their heads—the rumbling of wheels, the creaking of the wagon, the cracking of the whip, and the shout of the driver, tell us that the corn-harvest is already begun, and that the fields which, a few weeks ago, waved with their millions of heads of heavy wheat, and horned barley, are now shorn and piled up in golden sheaves. Here and there we may still see a few sun-burnt reapers at work, their foreheads bound round with various coloured handkerchiefs to keep off the heat, and their white sleeves showing like spots of light in the landscape, while the stooping attitudes of the gleaners, in costumes of all colours, the half-laden wagon in the centre of the field, the bold dark outline of the horses, the “shocks” of sheaves reared to dry at regular distances, and stretching in rows upon every rounded and stubbly furrow, together with the hill in the background, and the trees which everywhere rise up and break the level lines of the scene, make altogether such a pleasing picture, that for months afterwards it rises up before the imagination, and we think of it with feelings of delight. Nor can we gaze upon such a scene without thinking of the bountiful provision which the Creator has made for our wants, and feeling thankful that, amid the cold and darkness of the coming winter, we shall still be surrounded by plenty, and that the poor man will soon be enabled to eat his bread untaxed by the rich.

Beautiful as the hay-field is with its wind-rows and high piled cocks, and sweet perfume, still it falls far short of the interest and earnestness and sober bustle of the Wheat-harvest. During the getting in of the latter the farmer evinces more anxiety about the weather, for he well knows the damage that a few days rain would do to his crop, how the ears would begin to sprout, and the corn turn soft, and the loss he would have

to sustain in the market. The last thing at night he looks at the sky, and the appearance of a few dark clouds which hang over and threaten rain, are often the means of preventing him from enjoying a sound night's rest, however weary he may be. If the morning is fine, he is up and out amongst his men, feeling of a sheaf here, and handling a "shock" (a stack of eight sheaves) there, and carefully examining them to see if they will be dry enough, to be "carted off" and placed on the great stack in the rick-yard, or the high roofed barn, when the sun has been out an hour or two, and the morning dews are all dried up from the earth. Then he goes to another field, which lies further off, and is not quite so forward, to see how the reapers get on there, or how the mowers have cut down the barley, or to see that the swine, which were turned in after the field was cleared, are all safe. He passes groups of gleaners on his way, who curtsy and bow to him as he rides along, for he is one of those who, like Boaz in the Bible, permits them to glean even amongst the sheaves, taking care whenever he discovers that any of them have been stealing from the "shocks," never to allow them to enter his fields again, at least not during that harvest. Children he will only reprimand, and bid their mothers look closer after them, kindly adding, "that it is natural for them to get into mischief." A pretty sight it is to watch the little rustics, with their coarse gleaning bags hanging before them, and a pair of old scissors dangling by their side, dotting the corn-field, and ever bobbing down like so many crows, picking up an ear here and there, now pausing to straighten their aching backs, then halting to cut off the straw from the little handful of corn they have gleaned, before thrusting it into the bag which hangs before them; and working on, perhaps under the promise that if they gather four of those bag-fulls by night, they shall either have a piece of apple-pie when they get home, or if they keep up to their task until Saturday night, a halfpenny to spend in what

they like—not to be put in the money-box—no, no, for they know if it once gets there, it will only come out perhaps a year after, to help towards buying a pair of new, or second-hand shoes. Then to see how their little raw hands and red legs are pricked and pierced by the stubble, and are almost as hard and as rough as rasps, through being exposed to the weather. An important time is this for the poor mother who has a large family, and has the privilege of gleaning after her husband: Nor is it less interesting to watch the



REAPERS AT WORK:

to see how quick the sickle is put in amongst the standing corn, and when it is drawn out again, to notice that a great handful has been cut, and is then placed upon the twisted wheat-bands which are stretched across the stubble; and so they go on cutting down sheaf after sheaf, then tying them up, and, after a time, rearing the sheaves up into "shocks" or stacks," or "field-stacks," as they are called in some parts of the country, and which they place in two rows, three or four sheaves on each side, face to face, and all meeting together, and forming a fine yellow plummy top; then they plant another sheaf at each end, and leave the sun and wind to do their work; and, in a few days, the "shocks" are dry enough, and hard enough to be carried away in the wagon, load after load, until the whole harvest is got in. And rare gleanings are there, I can assure you, when those "shocks" are taken up; such a quantity of loose ears in the "cradle," as the spot is termed, where the sheaves stood, that there is sometimes a regular scramble amongst the gleaners, to see who can get the most; and the man who is loading the wagon is often compelled to threaten that he will lift them on the load with his fork, if they do not get further out of the way. Then to see the little harvest-mice and field-mice that scamper off when the shocks are removed; and which I will tell you all about when I have done with harvest-time, and all the bustle of the corn-field is over.

But I like Harvest-home best to come upon me unawares; to be rambling down some narrow, winding lane, which leads to nowhere but the fields, or to some old-fashioned footpath across them; a road which is never used only when the farmers get in their corn or hay. This is the spot to be sauntering in, and be startled by the loud "huzza!" and then to come suddenly upon the corn-field, and see the last load approaching the gate, while gleaners and all are shouting to the very top of their voices; just as they did in the days of Herrick, who lived in Shakespeare's time; and a capital poem Herrick wrote about Harvest-

home, which contains a description of how the boys ran after the last load and shouted, and what the farmer provided for the Harvest-feast. But I must extract a few lines, which are so plainly written that you cannot but understand them. The "thill" is an old Saxon word for shaft; the "thill horse" is the shaft horse, and was called so in the time of King Alfred. It is a true old English word, and is still used at the present day in many places in the country. And now for the extract from Herrick's "Hock-cart, or Harvest-home :"

"About the cart hear how the rout
Of rural younglings raise the shout,
Pressing before, some coming after,
Those with a shout, and these with laughter;
Some bless the cart, some kiss the sheaves,
Some prank them up with oaken leaves,
Some "pat" the thill-horse, some with great
Devotion stroke the home-borne wheat;
While other rustics, less attent
To prayer than to merriment,
Run after, with their garments rent."

Is not this a capital description, to be written above two hundred years ago? The "rural younglings," you know, means the boys and girls, who shouted and laughed, and ran before and after the load, some "with garments rent;" for you see any thing was good enough to glean in, and there were poor ragged children in those days. Some were so thankful, that they "stroked the corn-sheaves with great devotion;" for their hearts were glad, when they saw how bountifully Providence had again provided for their wants.

Onward comes the wagon—the last load reaches the village, at the end of which the good farmer lives, and every cottager rushes out to welcome it, and to shout as it passes. The tailor uncrosses his legs, throws down his goose and sleeve-board, and with his stockings hanging about his heels, and his spectacles shoved up to his forehead, raises his weak voice and

brandishes his shears, snapping them together over his head, and dancing a queer kind of a polka, and seeming so delighted that he would almost jump out of his skin if he could. The great brown blacksmith comes out of his smoky smithy, leaning on his ponderous hammer, and shouting so loudly with his deep rough voice, that you might hear him a mile off. The wheelwright leaves the spoke half-driven into the "nave," and untying his coarse, dirty apron, waves it over his head like a banner, making the chips and dirt fly in all directions: out also rushes the lame shoemaker, brandishing one of the big farmer's top-boots which he was at work upon, and shouting like the rest of his neighbours, and seeming quite as pleased as if the load of corn was his own; and he has every reason to be pleased, for his wife and four children have been allowed to glean in all the farmer's fields, ever since the first day that the reapers began to cut down the corn. The old deaf grandmother, who seldom leaves her creaking wicker chair in the chimney-corner, has for once quitted her spinning-wheel, and, shading the sunshine from her wrinkled face with her thin skinny hand, while the other rests on the horn-tipped staff, which has been her companion for fifty years, comes out, followed by the old grey cat, who looks almost as grave as herself, and seems sorely puzzled to know what it can be that has called forth its venerable mistress from her snug warm corner. And the poor old creature raises her shrill, cracked voice, to welcome home the last load: and she will be chatty and communicative all the evening after, and tell her grand-children what Harvest-homes she has seen in her day; and then she will begin to lament over good old customs, May-day games (which only live now in name), sheep-shearing feasts, and the merry doings there used to be at Christmas-tide, when she was a young woman.

Onward moves the wagon, amid the shouts of old and young. The very dogs run barking after it. A flag hangs out at the

village ale-house, with its sign of either “The Old Wheat-sheaf,”—“The Plough,”—or “The Barley-mow.” The landlord stands at the door, and flourishes his pipe round his head : the ostler pauses with the wisp of hay in his hand, and ceases to rub down the horse, which stands under the shed : the chamber-maid leans out of the window, and nods and smiles at everybody she knows : and the heavy wagon approaches the stack-yard. The farmer’s wife and daughter are at the door dressed in their holiday attire, and smiling welcome on all alike, right proud in their hearts of the many good things they have provided for the sun-burnt reapers :—the shouting becomes louder—the men on the wagon take off their hats—you see them point to the sheaf which stands up in the centre of the wagon, and is covered with blue ribands and beautiful flowers—they rend the air with loud huzzas. The very horses jerk their heads with pride, and toss the ears of corn and ribands and flowers about, with which they are adorned, while they draw in the last load ; as if they, too, were conscious that they had done their duty towards the gathering in of harvest. And now the wain is drawn up beside the huge corn-rick, where so many loads have been deposited ; sheaf after sheaf is added to the stack, until the last one is lifted upon the fork. Then rings out the great shout—the gathering together of all huzzas—and three-times-three is timed by the men on the corn-stack, the last loud welcome of Harvest-home. Then a feast is prepared in the barn, or under the large tree in the orchard, for the reapers ; and huge pieces of beef, and large plum-puddings are attacked by the hungry labourers, who every now and then empty great bumpers of ale, as they drink welcome to Harvest-home. Bloomfield, in his collection of poems, entitled, “Wild Flowers,” describes the Harvest-feast, which he calls the “Horkey,” and how one of the maidens, who had helped to reap the corn, rode on the top of the wagon, and was called the “Harvest Queen.” He says :—

HARVEST-HOME.

“ Home came the jovial ‘harvest’ load,
Last of the whole year’s crop ;
And Grace amongst the green boughs rode,
Right plump upon the top.

* * * *

This way and that the wagon reeled,
And never queen rode higher ;
Her cheeks were coloured in the field,
And ours before the fire.”

The last line alludes to the “cheeks” of the old gossip, whom Bloomfield has made to describe the scene, and whose face, like those who had assisted her, was coloured through exposure to the fire, whilst cooking and preparing the many substantial things which were consumed at the great Harvest-feast ; amongst which we must not forget to mention the roast geese. Oh ! such prime ones, for they have been turned out into the stubble, to make them fat against Michaelmas, a “stubble-fed goose” being considered the finest eating of any ; and such a dish you know, with a plum-pudding to follow, is not what we often meet with at school—and oh, how you would laugh to see in an evening the



GEESE RETURNING HOME,

as Bewick had often seen them, all in a row, and from whose admirable illustrations, we have copied this little sketch ; but whether it be a love of home, or a fear of the fox, that causes

them to keep such good hours, I must leave to the old goose who is seen leading the way to decide, and of whose wisdom, Skelton, who was poet laureat to King Henry the Eighth, makes merry mention, when he says,—

“When the rain raineth,
And the goose winketh,
Little wotteth the gosling
What the goose thinketh.”

Wotteth is a very old English word which signifies “knoweth,” and is often met with amongst our ancient authors.

But I was telling you about the Harvest-feast, before I set out on this wild goose-chase. You should be there to see them eat and drink; how you would stare at the holes they make in the roast geese! and some one, who perhaps has never tasted such a dainty dish since the last Harvest-feast, thrusts his plate forward to the man who is carving, and says, “May I trouble you for another leg of that goose?”—sitting too far off to perceive that both legs and wings have long since been devoured. Then the carver exclaims, “Why thou’st had two already, do’st think the goose had three legs? Try the beef again, man—try the beef;” at which they all laugh louder than ever, while he, who asked for the supply, says, “I wish the goose was all legs, they’re such easy picking.” And then again to hear them talk about the feats that they have accomplished in the harvest-field—the number of sheaves they have cut, tied, and reared up, within the space of a single day. They recall the hottest day they have reaped in, and the mere remembrance of it causes them to drink deeper draughts while they talk, “to quench,” as they say, “the spark in their throats.” They recount the many hours they have reaped between sunrise and sunset; who worked the longest, and who was the first to give in; what land was the heaviest cutting, and which field bore the lightest crop. Then there is ever a sly joke aimed at some one, who was almost always inquiring, whether it was

not time for luncheon or dinner; who visited the ale flagon oftener than he ought to do; and who liked



RESTING IN THE HARVEST-FIELD

better than reaping in the hot sun; “not that he was afraid of work,” say they, with knowing looks, “not he—he was so fond of it, that he would lie down and go to sleep beside it.” Then they laugh heartily, as if such a stale joke was quite new, and commence eating and drinking again, as if they had found new appetites, and never intended to leave off. Many such-like random shots of country wit are bandied about; for where all feel so great an inclination to be merry, it requires but little to furnish them with laughter. And nowhere does mirth abound more than at one of these old-fashioned feasts, which welcome in Harvest-home.

Beautiful are the woods at this season of the year, and never did the hand of an artist throw such rich colours upon the glowing canvas, as may now be found in the variegated foliage of the trees. The leaves of the beech are dyed in the deepest orange that ever the eye saw gathered in burning gold around an Autumn sunset, along the western slope of heaven. The dark green of the oak is in parts mellowed into a bronzy brown, blending beautifully with the faded yellow of the chestnut, and the deeper hues of the tall elm; while at intervals the sable fir settles down into dark shadows, between the alternate tints; and far as the eye can range along the wide outskirts of the forest, it revels in the mingled hues of mountain, field, ocean, and sky, as if the flowered meadow, and the purpled mountain, and the green billows of the sea, the blazing sunset, and the dark clouds of evening, had all rolled together their bright and sombre dyes, and gathered about the beautiful death-bed of the expiring Summer. Over the hedgerow trails the rambling briony, and we see bunches of crimson and green berries, half tempting us by their gushing ripeness to taste the poisonous juice which lies buried beneath their deceptive beauty. The hips of the wild rose rest their rich scarlet upon the carved ebony of the luscious blackberry, while the deep blue of the sloe throws over all the rich velvet of its fruit, as it stands crowned with its ruddy tiara of hawthorn-berries. On the ground are scattered thousands of polished acorns; their carved and clear cups lying empty amongst the fallen leaves, until gathered by the village children, who deck their rustic stools with these primitive tea services, and assemble round them with smiling faces, and looks of eager enjoyment, while they sip their sugar and water out of these old fairy-famed drinking vessels.

In addition to all these lights and shadows of Autumnal splendour, we every now and then stumble upon great groups of agarics, or fungi, of all hues and of all names, as mushrooms, toadstools, giants'-buttons, fuzz-balls, &c., stained with every

dye that can be seen upon the face of heaven, blue and silver and gold and crimson, and some of them rising to near a foot in height, and as large round as the crown of a man's hat; and many a time have we gathered an agaric whose gaudy colours baffle all description, and so richly spotted, that for variety and beauty of tint, the proudest flower that ever opened beneath the sun must have bowed before it. We have seen them scattered about the grassy glades of forests in broad round clusters of yellow and white, as if an army of fairies had been contending, and startled by some human footstep in the midst of the affray, had cast down their shields of gold and silver in their affright, as they retreated somewhere into the deep and undisturbed solitudes. As for puff-balls, we have many a time seen them larger than a man's head, weighing several pounds, and when broken to pieces, covering many feet of ground. Far away stretched acres of broad-leaved fern, now changing from their glossy green into a deep brown russet; while around them gathered an armed host of thistles, the sport of every passing breeze that flew by, which plucked with its unseen hands the proud plumes from their feathered helmets, and sent them floating over the gathered lines of the banded fern. Blue below bowed a little army of harebells; their azure cups ever moving as if they rang out a dying dirge for the departed Summer—a low, mournful peal, which rings not upon mortal ears, sounding over the graves of the buried flowers which sleep still and mute below, each under its little hillock of fallen and faded leaves. Above them waves some solitary woodbine; its lonely tendril rocking to and fro with a mournful motion, as if the last flower it bore had lost its way, wondering where its Summer companions had gone, and afraid of being left alone in such a changing solitude. All these, and many another object rise before us, marking the solemn majesty of Autumn, and throwing over the scene a gloomy kind of grandeur, causing us to reflect how all that is beautiful in this world is subject to

fade, and making us thoughtful while we witness the slow decay of all that we so recently admired. But Autumn is not without its pleasures, and it is only to one fond of solitude and musing alone, that his mind would find in the falling leaves, images of melancholy, and in the departed flowers recall scenes which the heart sighs for in vain ; these are but the regrets that come with after years, when we have lost dear friends whom we fondly loved, and who, perhaps, many a time had been our companions, when we wandered over such scenes in the sunshine and Summer of bygone years.

But now I am about to bring before you wild scenes and solitary places, which I often rambled over in my boyish days with my light-hearted schoolfellows, when we sallied out a blackberrying and nutting and crab-gathering, visiting such strange out-of-the-way places, as you never read about before in any books but romances ; and such as you perhaps never saw in your life, although I have, and am glad of it now, because it enables me to tell you of many strange things, which but for this, you might perhaps never have known. You can hardly believe the pleasure it gives me to tell you about my boyish days, and the adventures I met with in those vast forest-like woods, and how freshly every scene rises before me whilst I am writing, even to the very shapes of the trees, and the open spaces between them, and the great gorse bushes that rose like walls, all around the spot—while every way stretched sharp thorny bushes covered with sloes and bullaces, from which have sprung all our beautiful varieties of damsons. Oh, what fine wild hedge-rows we saw ! hedges which had never been cut within the memory of man ! where the brambles had grown one over another, year after year, until they covered the whole of the waste land up to the very edge of the brown dusty high-road—so wide, so interlaced together that, would they but have borne the weight, you might have driven three wagons a-breast over miles and miles of bramble-berry bushes—over a waste

which no man could ever remember having been cultivated. High up the bushes went, even to the summit of the hedge, which engirdled the field beyond, and down they came sloping to the very foot of the roadside—a vast embankment covered every way with sloe and bullace-bushes, and brambles, on which hung millions and millions of blackberries: where we could fill our baskets in a very short time. Along the stone causeway, and up by Corringham, and far out it extended, until you came to the wild unenclosed, primeval, uncultivated Scroggs.

And now, as I promised to do, I am going to describe to you such a scene as you never beheld in your life—a spot that stands alone—for I have never met with another that bears any resemblance to it in all the hundreds of miles that I have ridden and traversed on foot, throughout England. A wild pathless place covering hundreds and hundreds of acres of land, and that was never turned up by the ploughshare, or reclaimed from its wild, savage, original state, since the day when England first rose up, a vast island from the depths of the ocean. Here grew hawthorns, so huge and old and grey and weather-beaten, that they looked as if a hundred stems had grown twisted and knotted together, and had become so hardened by time, that they had at last got fused into a mass like iron, over which the elements had no further power. Beside these grew great gigantic crab-trees, their knotted stems overgrown with the mosses and lichens which had gathered there for centuries, and from the very decay of the parent bole shot up amid the dead, white, withered, and skeleton boughs, a new tree that overlooked the wilderness. At irregular distances, uprose some mighty and majestic oak whose giant head had been struck by the bolt of Heaven long centuries ago, and which had lived on in spite of the thunder that clove its stem, and the lightning that singed its branches—standing like the wreck and monument of an old and forgotten world. And all around this vast wilderness, of venerable and hoary trees, stretched a wide

pathless expanse of entangling underwood, where the hazel, and the blackthorn, and the bullace, and the sloe, and the long thorny bramble, and the armed holly, and the pointed gorse, and the trailing woodbine, and the matted ivy, were blended with the broom, and the deep umber of the Autumn-browned fern, in one close impenetrable mass, so armed, and so impassable, that it was only here and there we were enabled to force our way, through the pointed and speary mass of underwood. We saw trees covered with ripe crabs, and great round dark bullaces, which we in vain attempted to approach, for unless armed in mail from head to heel, we never could have got to where they grew, without tearing ourselves to pieces—and those who have never seen such a sight will wonder, when I tell them that there were hundreds of gorse bushes matted together from twelve to fourteen feet in height—that far away there stretched one immense covert of sloe and bullace bushes, between which hundreds of crooked branches shot up and trailed over, as if they had been struggling years and years for the mastery, and ever above this solemn wilderness hovered scores of great birds, sharp-beaked hawks, and wide-winged kites, and great gleads, and dusky ravens, and horned owls, that we have started with staring eyes, from the hollow trees at noon-day, and that went sailing above the wild underwood, and between the white and withered branches of the trees; many of them perhaps having never been before startled by the sound of a human voice. From out the shadowy barrier of the copse-wood rushed many a wild, strange-looking animal, such as could only be found in so old and solitary a place,—the wild-cat, and the fox, and the founmart, the stoat, and the weasel, and the martin, and the quick-footed hare, and the grey badger, that run off wondering who it was that had dared to invade his solitary dominions; and every now and then great hairy-armed bats darted by on their leathern wings, started from the hollows of the decayed trees, by the blows which we had struck upon the

stems—and there was something so lonely and desolate which hung about this strange, wild, solitary scene, that, when in the midst of it, we never dared to wander far from each other; for there were no fields near it, but on either hand, woods went stretching into woods,—Springthorpe wood, and Somerby wood, and Caistor wood, and White's wood, and Lea wood; all running into each other, with no other boundary than here and there the deep dark water-course, whose banks were infested with snakes, and whose waters were haunted with thousands of newts, and frogs, and toads; and in this wild, dreamy, old, out-of-the-way woodland world, we were wont, when boys, to go and gather nuts, and crabs, and bramble-berries, sloes, and bullaces, and hips, and haws, and all those forest fruits which had grown there wild, ages before the ancient Druids worshipped the old oaks in our island—perchance, before the painted and naked Briton was startled in his hut at midnight, by the long howl of the wolf, and the sound of the wild boar, sharpening his glittering tusks in the moonlight, upon the iron stem of some old misletoe-covered oak.

Grand and awful was the thunder storm which I once witnessed on those scroggs; just fancy such a spot darkened over with deep thunder-clouds! looking as if night was descending upon the earth, ere the sun had accomplished little more than half his journey across the sky. Imagine a blackness and a stillness, amid which not a leaf appeared to move; where even the light down of the thistle rested upon the spot where it had alighted, and the very air seemed not to breathe in its sleep. Then in a moment this awful silence was broken by the loud, sudden bursting of the deep-mouthed thunder, as if shaking the very earth on which we stood, Over the vast wilderness it went sounding, dark, and far away, to where in the distance the trees looked as if resting upon a sky of ink; so black and lowering hung the thunder-clouds. Then came the blazing lightning, making, for a moment, the whole forest scene red as the

mouth of a burning furnace ; it passed on, and all again settled down into a deep twilight gloom. A few moments more, and a silence more awful than the first seemed to reign over the scene. Then came another peal of thunder, longer and louder than the first. The foundations of the earth jarred, as they rocked beneath it : and then in an instant there descended a heavy deluge of rain, as if the floor of heaven had burst, and some mighty river was rushing through its deep bed. Again the wild woodland was lighted up for an instant, and in the distance the trees appeared resting upon a background of fire ; so red and lurid was the glare of the lightning, that filled up the whole scene. Heavier and heavier descended the rain, falling like an avalanche upon the leaves and the boles of the trees ; and when the loud artillery of heaven had again sent forth its earth-shaking thunder, a mighty wind sprang up, and went sweeping through the forest, making the old trees groan again, as it tore through their grey, gnarled, and knotted branches. Awful and startling was that contrast, from the silence which but a few minutes before had rested on all around ! Trees, whose roots had been anchored in the earth for centuries, seemed now struggling with the tempest to retain their ancient footing ; while their branches clashed together as if in anger, as they were bowed, and bent, beneath the overwhelming element. Although in a few minutes we were thoroughly soaked to the skin, yet we still remained in an open space in the under-wood, well knowing how dangerous it is to seek shelter under a tree during a thunder-storm, as the lightning generally strikes the objects that stand most prominent. Oh what a scene it was ! I have witnessed many thunder-storms, but never remember one like that which we saw, and were out in, on Corringham Scroggs !

A rare haunt was this in Autumn for the Woodcock, a bird which we seldom see in summer : which somehow seems to make its appearance all at once, coming, nobody can tell how,

WOODCOCK.

and contriving almost always to land in the night. As the woodcocks bring no luggage with them when they return from their long sea voyage, they put up at the first inn they come near, which is generally either a hedge, or a ditch; and without disturbing either boots or ostler, chambermaid or innkeeper, there they take up their quarters until the following morning. They mostly rest a day or two before they proceed further into the country, for they have neither had the assistance of sail or steam, to aid them in crossing the stormy sea—nothing but their poor little wings to beat up against the wind with, and dash off the cold sea spray—that is if it ever reached so high as where they flew; and you marvel that they have come so far to feed only on such simple fare as insects and worms. The



WOODCOCK

leaves the woods in the evening twilight, where at such times you may hear scores of them making a shrill noise, not unlike that of the snipe. Poor little things! hundreds of them, during the season, fall a prey to the fowler and the gunner.

The former captures them in his net; and the latter fires at them when resting on the ground, or on the trees, whenever he can find an opportunity. They are a sadly persecuted race, and I dare say, if they ever wish at all, would be glad to have as strong a savour as the pole-cat, if it would but save them from being shot at so often. You will not often meet with them out of the woods in the daytime, whilst in the evening, they are here and there and everywhere, breaking out like a lot of boys who have just escaped from school; and at this season they breakfast, dine, and sup, like regular dissipated rakes, who love to turn night into day. Their eyes seem to be of no use to them in the daytime, excepting to enable them to see when danger is at hand, for they can catch their prey in the dark, feel a worm, or smell out an insect, without either the aid of lamp or lantern; like Dame Trott's cat, they can catch whatever they pursue in the dark. The bill of the woodcock is about three inches long, and, by all accounts, as sensitive to feeling as the horns of the snail. Had man but such a nose in proportion to his size, he would have to look a yard before him to see the end of it. The plumage of this bird is a mixture of black and grey, while the under parts are of a dim yellow, with dusky streaks. It sometimes, though very rarely, remains with us all the year round, when it builds a nest of moss, grass, and dry leaves, within which it lays four or five eggs of a yellowish white, spotted with brown and ash colour. The eggs are somewhat larger than those of a pigeon.

Then, as I have before told you, these Scroggs were famous for all of kinds Horned Owls, and White Owls, and Sparrow Owls, and Little Horned Owls; some of them with large heads, looking, as they peeped through the trees, for all the world like cats; and unless you have seen young owls, you never saw such white, little, woolly things in your life as they are; and famous mousers were these owls, I can tell you, nor would a farmer drive one out of his barn for the world, for he knows that an

OWLS.



OWL

will destroy as many mice as the best cat he has got. Oh how stupid an owl seemed, if we once started it from its roost in the day time, when the sun was shining bright; for then it went blundering along, hitting its head first against one thing, then against another, until sometimes it would fall bang upon the ground; and then, perhaps, after receiving a sharp bite upon the finger, which drew the blood, we were enabled to carry off the great, staring, stupid creature in our hats. Then there was another owl with a smaller head, which we were never able to make head or tail of, for it used to spring up from out of the fern and long grass, fly a little way, and then alight again; but we never once saw it settle upon a tree, and sometimes had our doubts whether it was an owl at all, although the country people called it the Mouse-hawking owl.

And now, having, I hope, prepared your minds for a ramble in the woods, I will endeavour to carry you along with me, and make you fancy, whilst you are reading these pages, that we are out amongst the great oaks, and strolling along wild alleys, between the trees. So, hurrah! hurrah! and now, my boys! come along, and let's be off upon our journey. Bundle the books out of your school-bags: get the longest

hooked stick you can : fill your pockets with bread and cheese : put on the worst clothes you can find ; then let us assemble together with a loud huzza, before we set out for a day's nutting in the woods. Let us, for once, forget all about school, and our tasks, and hard sums, undone, and German-text copies unfinished, and give up our minds to the joys of another glad holiday ; to dream of the clusters of brown ripe nuts we shall gather before night, and the rich banquet we shall find spread for us, in some great hall of blackberries.

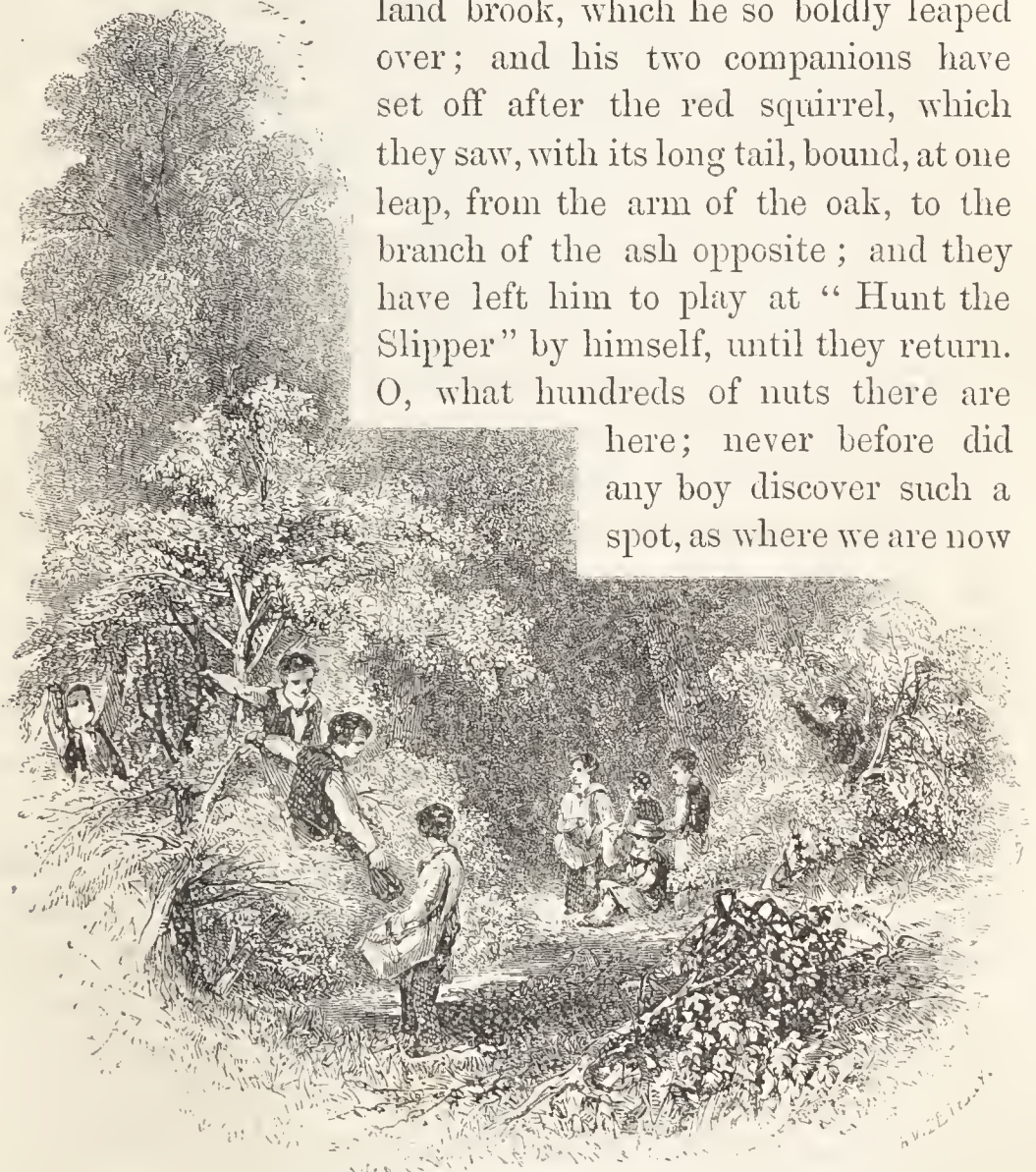
Here we are ! Bang through this open gap in the hedge let us go—we cannot make it worse ; for the sportsmen, with their guns, have been here before us, and the mounted hunters will come after us, as they chase the poor fox—all helping to make a rich harvest for the fagot gatherer ; so that it would only be a waste of labour to repair the fence again before Spring. “ But we shall be taken up,” squeaks some tiny boy, with a weak voice ; “ Then they may set us down again,” exclaims some daring lad, with a bolder heart ; for he well knows, that many a boy has gone a nutting there years before us ; and the kind old squire is too much of an Englishman to disgrace his woods with notice to trespassers ; and the worst we can do will be to trample underfoot the bracken, the bramble, and the useless underwood. For my part, I have no love for those purse-proud selfish proprietors, who will neither enjoy the woods they possess themselves, nor permit others to spend a merry day, now and then, within them. Æsop had his eye on such men as these, when he shadowed forth the “ Dog in the Manger,” in his fable.

Now, before we separate, we must make a bargain :—One or two boys shall remain here, under this large oak tree, to keep a guard over our basket of provisions, and to blow a loud blast occasionally on the whistle, so that in case any of us should get lost, we may know what point to steer for by that sound. You see which way the shadows of the trees fall :

you cannot well mistake east from west now—so off we go. Hurra! hurra! “Oh dear!” exclaims one, “I’ve got fast in a bramble bush;” while his companion, twenty yards ahead, is calling upon him, in vain, to come and admire the large clusters of nuts, seven of which hang in a bunch on the highest bough, where the top of the hazel catches the sunshine, far beyond his reach. Little Dick has lost his shoe, somewhere amid the dead leaves, that strew the bank beside the wood-

land brook, which he so boldly leaped over; and his two companions have set off after the red squirrel, which they saw, with its long tail, bound, at one leap, from the arm of the oak, to the branch of the ash opposite; and they have left him to play at “Hunt the Slipper” by himself, until they return.

O, what hundreds of nuts there are here; never before did any boy discover such a spot, as where we are now



NUTTING IN THE WOOD.

Such a place !—do come and look ! Not a soul has been here before us—not a branch is broken—not a tall tuft of grass trampled down ! Now, as I hook down the boughs, do you lay fast hold of 'em, and be sure and don't leave go ; for, if you do, you'll get such a switch over the face as you have n't had for many-a-day, I can tell you. Did you ever see such a quantity of nuts together in your life ! and such a size too ! Here's a bunch ! but I have n't time to count how many there are on it ; and many of the nuts are so ripe, that they actually fall upon the ground, if we shake the bough. Were we not lucky to find out such a spot ? and look how beautifully the sunshine comes down upon the leaves ! We can see the light streaming through, as if we were overhung by a green transparent curtain of silk. Do but look what a height the ivy has climbed up that great tall ash tree ! Wouldn't it be pleasant to lead a life like Robin Hood, and always live in the woods, if it was all summer like this ; and yet I should think he must often have been cold in the winter-time, when the snow laid upon the ground. Oh ! I've just found a nut with a double kernel in it. Such a fine one ! Do eat this half—it's so nice. Did you see that bird fly by just now ? It was a jay—should n't I like to catch it ! Do come here—make haste—never saw such a load of blackberries in my life ! so ripe, and as big as damsons ! Now we have a feast ! What's that—a snake ? I think it's an adder. Let's be off. Where's my bag and nuts ?—have you got my stick ? Do stop a minute till I've found my cap. What a frightened chap you are to run off that way ! I was n't going to leave my things behind, just because we happened to see a poor harmless snake. What a way you run without stopping for me, I say ! do you know where we are ? I have n't heard the whistle sound for some time—have you ? Whatever shall we do, if we get lost, eh ? I forget what he said about the shadows of the trees : let me see ;—if they fell behind us we were in the east ;—no, that's not it. Well, it must be the west then. But the sun seems to stand

straight over our heads; and I do feel so hungry, I would n't mind giving a good handful or two of nuts for a slice of bread and cheese. I don't know which way to turn: but I am not a bit frightened. What's the use of talking about the "Babes in the Wood" and blackberries now?

"I am sure we're going wrong," exclaims some timid boy, "it's no use venturing further this way. There does n't seem to be any road out here—whatever should we do if a great wolf were to jump up and show his teeth at us?"—"Nonsense!" answers his braver companion, "you know there are no wolves now—do n't you remember reading about them in the History of England, and how so much a head was paid for destroying them, in the time of the Saxons?"—"But might n't one or two escape and breed in the woods, and then you know the old wolves would show the young ones, where they used to hide themselves; and so they may have gone on for years concealing themselves. We often hear of scores of sheep being devoured in a night—who knows but it may be the wolves that come out of the woods to worry 'em?"—"Nonsense—come along—I tell you, there are no wolves now, and haven't been for hundreds of years. Don't talk so."—"Well, but if there are no wolves, there may be something worse—you know we've heard of lions, and tigers, and leopards escaping, and running away out of wild beast shows; and, of course, they always hide themselves in the woods, and who knows whether they ever catch them again or not? I think we'd better climb up into one of these high trees, till they come to look for us, we shall be safe there—oh, dear, what's that running up there? Look it's red with a great long tail like a lion. What's that?"—"Why it's only a fox, which perhaps mistook you for a great goose, as you are, to talk such nonsense. You talk about Robin Hood—why, if a wild cat was only to come and look at you, with its great eyes, you'd be frightened to death; come along with you, there's a footpath here: it's sure to lead somewhere,

let's go straight along it—listen! do you hear that sound, it's the tinkling of sheep-bells, we're not far from the side; didn't I tell you we were all right? Look you, here we've come out at an opening in the wood; and see, there's a woman and her child going along, and the spire of a church in the distance, let us go up to the woman and inquire our way back."

Such was the adventure which befel two youths, many years ago, who lost their way, one Autumn, whilst out nutting in the woods. The poor woman and her child, whom they chanced to stumble upon, had been out in the woods gathering blackberries: and she, like Comus, in Milton's *Mask*, bearing that title (a work which every boy ought to read who is fond of beautiful descriptive poetry), led them back without any difficulty to the large oak, from which they had started before they were lost, for like Comus she knew—

"Each lane and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell of that wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side,
Her daily walks and ancient neighbourhood."

A few pence amply rewarded her for her kindness, and with the loss of a satchel and a hook-stick, they fell to, with an excellent appetite, and enjoyed their rural repast of bread and cheese and home-brewed beer; and he who had evinced so much fear, sat down and ate heartily, and thought no more about wolves, lions, tigers, and leopards, than if no such things existed in the world; and even when his hunger was appeased and he was twitted a little by his companion, he leaped up courageously, and brandishing his little stick amid a score of his schoolfellows, said he should just like to see a wolf come—that was all—they would see what he would do—at which they all laughed aloud, especially when one of them imitated the growl of a tiger, at which our little hero, whose heart appeared to be no bigger than a bumble-bee, dropped his stick, looked very pale, and exclaimed, "Oh dear, what was that?" But

remember, he was a very little lad, who had read so much about wild beasts, and other things abroad, that they had almost turned his head; and he had never before been lost in a wood; what he would have done had he been left alone we know not, though we scarcely think that he would have had courage to have gathered blackberries, like the babes in the wood in the ballad, but giving it up for a bad job, laid down at once, and cried himself to sleep, fully expecting when he awoke, to find that a score or two of little cock-robins had covered him carefully up with leaves; for he was a terrible little coward, though in the playground magnanimous as a mouse. He often amused us, by showing how he could kill a lion with the first blow—make a tiger run off without so much as bidding him good morning—and as for an alligator, Waterton's feat of riding upon the back of one, was not to be named beside what he would do, if one happened to come marching up into the school-yard some fine morning. Poor little fellow! we had often meditated a plan for losing him in the wood, watching him at a distance to see what he would do, but not one of us was hard-hearted enough to put such a plan into execution.

And now I will tell you an adventure which befel myself, and two other boys, whilst we were out nutting in Warton wood—that large wood which I have before told you about in my Summer Book—and how we met with a real wild animal that looked as savage, and was half as big as a young tiger. “I know we shall see something,” exclaimed a little timid boy, who greatly resembled the one I have been describing. And a minute or two after he came running up out of an avenue, or opening between the trees, up which he had ventured a few yards by himself, looking quite pale with fright, as he said, “Oh! yonder it is; don't go, or you'll be killed, then whatever shall I do? I can never find my way home again by myself!” But we were not so easily daunted, and away we went to look; and there it was sure enough, a large, savage-looking



WILD CAT,

striped like a tiger. Oh! you should have seen it; such strong, stout legs, and such a thick tail! not tapering to a point like that of a tame cat, but thick and bushy all the way up; while it showed its sharp teeth, and growled like a tiger; as if it intended to spring upon us, as it stood with its claw fixed upon a rabbit which it had killed. Nor would the bravest gamekeeper, that ever traversed a forest, like to have met with such an enraged wild cat as we saw, unless he had had his gun with him, for it is the only really dangerous animal that is to be found wild, in our English forests, in the present day, and it would require a powerful and courageous dog to worry one of them. The female forms her nest either in the hollow root of some large old tree, some hidden opening in the rocks, or concealed dell in the woody mountains, where she brings forth four or five young ones, so savage, that they will spit at you when they are only a few days old. The wild cat often conceals itself amongst the darkest and thickest branches of the trees—when, should a poor bird chance to come within reach, it springs upon it in an instant; and there is no escaping from the clutch of its hooked claws, and the deep, piercing bite of its trenchant teeth. In former times the wild cat was very common in the old English forests, and was in those days very

difficult to destroy; for when chased by the dogs, it could run up a tree like a squirrel; and you may readily imagine that a bolt, or arrow, shot from a bow, oftener missed, than hit it, when it was high up amongst the old gnarled boughs of the trees. It was only in after days, when powder began to flash, and bullets to whistle about its ears, that they were able to thin the country of this ferocious animal.

Well! there stood this savage-looking brute, with his paw planted upon the dead rabbit, his eyes flashing like fire, while he switched his thick tail to and fro, and growled, and set his teeth at us, as if hesitating which he should spring upon first. I need not tell you how we took to our heels; one big boy, however, having daring enough to throw a stick at the wild cat before he started off after us. Off we went, straight a-head, through ferns and brambles and bush-thorns, as if no such things existed in the wood. We neither stopped to look at the fallen acorns, nor the beautiful brown nuts, that hung so temptingly over our heads; we left the ripe wild crabs untouched, and paused not to gather either blue sloes, or black bullaces, from the numerous bushes we hurried past; for bold as the bearing of the bigger boy was, when he hurled the stick at the wild cat, it no more resembled true courage, than that manifested by a lad, who will dare to knock at twelve o'clock at night at a church door, and the moment he has done so, be the foremost to run away. Nor would it have been wisdom for him to have come to close quarters with such an armed enemy; for if the cat had once flown at his face or throat, it might perhaps have left such a wound, as would have been a long while healing, even had it done him no more serious injury. But you must not think that every cat you chance to see in a wood is a real wild one; for many stray cats are to be found in such spots, which have wandered from home, or been lost, and they manage to breed and live well enough in these wild places, abounding in birds and field mice as they do.

But to return to our adventure. We run on, and on, until we were fairly lost; and had not chance at last led us into a path, which had been made by the gamekeepers, when they went round to look after the game, there is no knowing to where we might have gone in the end: for I can tell you this was a real old English wood, with oaks in it hundreds of years old; and a battle had been fought beside it above two hundred years ago, between the soldiers of Cromwell, and the royalists, who drew their swords for the cause of King Charles the First, all of which you have no doubt read about in English history.

But, thank God, there are no such scenes now-a-days in this country, and I trust that war will soon cease in every corner of the world. Just fancy what a shocking sight it must have been for us English boys to have beheld as we returned from nutting, if when we had gained the outskirts of the wood, we had seen a lifeless soldier here, a dead horse there; further on another bleeding, and wounded, and groaning piteously; the ground strewn over with arms—swords, and spears, and pistols, battered helmets, and coats of mail; and far down in the valley below, the pursued and the pursuers still in sight, their course marked by death and desolation. Yet about two hundred years ago, such sights were not uncommon in England; and while we read the glowing pages of history, we are too apt to forget how much bloodshed and death—how many sighs, and heart-rending groans, and tears, it took to complete a single victory. Ever bear in mind also, that the boasted laurels which crown the conqueror, have been gathered in fields of blood: that the drums, and trumpets, and glittering arms, of our boldest soldiers, are but the shop-front decorations of men whose trade is slaughter—who are compelled to commit murder, when called upon by the rulers of their country to do so. These are hard truths for young minds like yours to digest, but they are truths that must be told: and although in all ages of the world, men have been justly branded as cowards, who have refused to fight

in the defence of their country, still there have ever been found amongst mankind, those who preferred war before peace—who have done all they could to get men to murder one another, only for the love they had of fighting—and this they have miscalled glory. Wounds, and shrieks, and yells, and fields flowing with human blood, and strewn over with the mangled bodies of dead and dying men—all these revolting horrors they have dared to call glory! and when hundreds of human bodies have been thrown, like dogs, into one common pit, they have called it a glorious grave! Surely they might have found some other name, if they had tried, more expressive of the truth: for where ten soldiers have perished in the defence of their country only, a hundred have been sacrificed by the ambition of such cruel leaders as Napoleon. No! ever remember, my boys, that war at best, and under the most justifiable circumstances, is an evil, which every good man would fain avoid.

Perhaps all of you are not aware, that there is an active lively little animal, almost as beautiful as the squirrel, called the Marten, which inhabits our woods, and is so wild that it is almost impossible to tame it. And although this little creature is not more than eighteen inches long, yet it can readily destroy either a hare or a rabbit; and as for rats, mice, and moles, it can nip them up like winking. It would make you stare to see a marten run up a tree, you never see it slip back an inch, you behold it at the root one moment, and the next, it is lost amid the thick foliage of the branches; for you have no idea of the hold it has with those long sharp claws. Only let a bird nestle anywhere amongst the leaves, and up goes its big round ears, when it opens its large eyes, and quick as thought, it is upon the poor feathered victim in a moment, not even leaving it time to say, “Bless me! what a hurry you’re in!” for its sharp pointed mouth is at the throat of its winged captive in an instant. If once it gets concealed anywhere about a farmyard, the old dame may bid good-by to her hen and

chickens ; for while there is one on the perch, or any where near, the marten never knows what it is to go to bed without its supper. The old cock may bluster and crow, and shake his spurs and flap his wings, but it's all of no use ; for if the



MARTEN

is not caught, he's sure to go at last ; and if it finds good quarters, it will make itself quite at home, erecting its nest in the barn, or any ruined outshed, for it's nowise particular, but seems quite contented, even if it's a hole in a tree, so long as there is a duck or a goose left in the neighbourhood. And then it sometimes brings up two or three families in a year, each consisting of four or five little martens, who begin to pick chickens almost as soon as they can run, and whose example is followed by every succeeding brother and sister. For they seem very fond of, boarding and lodging, near a large comfortable farmyard, making themselves as much at their ease, as if they had come to spend a week there ; and would, no doubt, if they wore stockings, have brought their knitting with them. And then the fur on their skins is so long and soft and beautiful, and above all, so valuable, that could you but kill a

marten for every chicken that is destroyed, strange as it may sound, you'd become a gainer by the loss. It has also a bushy tail, about nine inches long, which is of great use in balancing it when it runs among the long narrow branches. There used to be one in the Surrey Zoological Gardens, which, when driven out of its box, seemed as mad as a March hare; but how mad that is, it would puzzle me to tell you; though I can assure you that it used to run out, and bang itself against the wires, as if its head had been made out of the end of a poker.

But the name of the marten has recalled a queer, odd, old fellow, whom I well knew, and who was called the Miser of Martin; for such was the name of the village in which he lived. You never heard of such an old save-all as he was; not but what economy is highly to be commended; but when, like him, persons have plenty, and yet deny themselves the common comforts of life, and only hoard their money up for the sole love of money, without making any use at all of it, either to benefit themselves or any body else, then it is that they become miserable misers, like the old man of Martin.

And now I'll tell you all about the old miser, who was a downright nip-pinch, and too miserable to live. The old women used to say that he would have skinned a flint to have saved a halfpenny, if he had spoilt a sixpenny knife in doing it; and what made it all the worse was, that he had plenty of money, and possessed several houses in the neighbourhood. Nobody could ever remember him having had a new coat, and the one he did wear he seldom put on properly, except in wet weather, for he used to throw it over the shoulders, and tie it at the front with a string, leaving the sleeves to dangle down. If any body asked him why he wore his coat in that fashion, he would answer, "to save the sleeves." He used to carry his money sewed up in the waistband of his leather breeches, until it came to twenty pounds, when he put it in the bank. Nothing in the world would have induced him to have un-

ripped one of those stitches and taken a sovereign out when he had once placed it there, until he had made up the appointed sum of twenty pounds, when off he trudged to the bank. He used to mend his own shoes, and do his own washing; and you could not have found an old-clothes dealer from Whitechapel to Westminster, who would have given half-a-crown for the whole suit he wore. Yet, miser as he was, he always kept some little boy as a servant, and you may readily guess what sort of a place a lad had, under such a nip-pinching sort of a master. The first question he always asked the boy was—"Could he whistle!" for I must tell you the old miser used to keep a barrel of small beer in his cellar, and he would never permit a boy to go down and draw any of the beer, unless he whistled all the time, while he himself stood listening at the cellar-head; for he used to say, "he can't drink and whistle at a breath." But he had one lad called Jack, who was too deep for him, for Jack often contrived to have a playmate outside the cellar-light, who used to thrust his head down and whistle while Jack drunk; Jack, in return, whistling again while his companion emptied a mug of beer. It strangely puzzled the old miser, for a long time, to account for the barrel so soon becoming empty; but as Jack had occasionally thrown a jug or two of water down the cellar-light, the old man, of course, concluded that the barrel leaked; so Jack and his companion whistled the old man out of cask after cask, always contriving to keep up a swim beneath the barrel. To save firing, he used to make Jack boil bacon and potatoes sufficient to last for three or four days, at one time; and one day he sent Jack ten miles to a market-town, on an errand, and gave him a penny to get his dinner at a cook-shop: "You'll make a very good shift with a penny Jack," said he, "for you're a fine growing lad and don't want much meat; I would give you more, only I have no change; and as to breaking into a sixpence, you know it's a thing I never do Jack, for if you once begin to change

silver, it makes sad havoc with your accounts, and is sure to throw you wrong; halfpence you may remember. I dined there once myself Jack, for a penny, and a very good dinner I had. I'll tell you how I went on: I ordered a pennyworth of potatoes, and they brought me three fine, nice, mealy ones, as ever you'd wish to see; then I begged a spoonful of gravy, which they gave me, and very delicious it was Jack; mustard, salt, and pepper, always stand upon the table for any body to help themselves as likes, and there's no charge for that; and you'll generally find a little ketchup in the cruets, but it's best to look round before you empty it, as they might grumble when you only pay a penny for your dinner. Then you'll see a beautiful large jug of toast-and-water on the table, Jack, with a piece of toast in it as big as both your fists, that's for the customers, there's no charge for that, Jack, and when you've had a hearty drink, if you don't feel as if you'd had sufficient dinner, wipe your hands clean on the table-cloth, then take out the toast and eat it. That's the way to dine for a penny, Jack. It's true the man grumbled a bit, and said he'd thank me to take my custom somewhere else another time, but I paid him what he charged, and what more would he have had; besides, Jack, it saved my changing a shilling. Now be a good lad, mind what I've said to you, and take care of the money you have got to receive, which is ten and three pence halfpenny; then, perhaps, I may give you the halfpenny for yourself when you come back, Jack, or save it for you, and if I do, you know that'll make three halfpence I owe you, Jack; and four three halfpences make sixpence, and two sixpences make a shilling, and it only takes twenty shillings to make a pound. You'll soon be a rich man, Jack." Jack, however, had his journey of twenty miles for nothing, not so much as getting the promised halfpenny. He had knocked, he said, but, there was no answer.

"Perhaps they've run away in my debt," exclaimed the old miser, "must go myself to-morrow morning, the first thing—

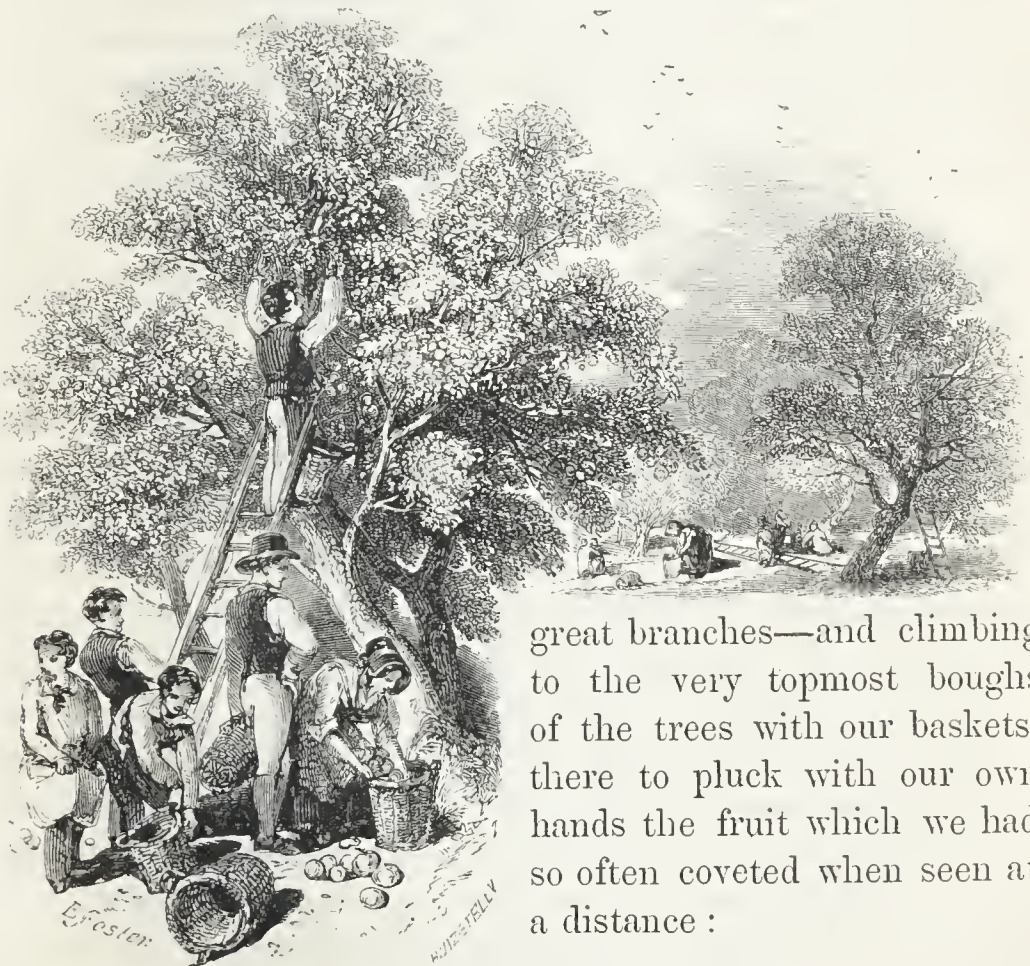
to lose such a sum would ruin me; I shall leave you out a piece of bread, Jack, and as there are plenty of blackberries on the hedges now, you can run out for an hour and dine like a prince. Be sure and lock the door, and take the key with you, for fear anybody should run away with the fitch of bacon and the ham, Jack; and when you dine off the blackberries, Jack, you may as well take the pig with you, it may pick up a few acorns, and you can drive it into the sty when you get back, it will save giving it a meal." So the old man took his stick in his hand, and with a slice of bread in his pocket, and a small piece of cold fat bacon, set out on his journey, resolving within himself that if he did not get the money, he would not be so extravagant as to lay out a penny in dining at the cook's shop. After a walk of ten miles the old man found that as the son had gone to the village where he resided, he had taken the money with him, intending to leave it. "Dear me," said the old man, "if he should happen to call while Jack's at his dinner what a bad job it'll be—I must go back again directly." "It's a bad job both ways," said the man who had sent his son with the money, "for the person he's gone to see has called here since he went, and has bought and paid for the horse which he has gone to ask him to come and look at; and what is worse, he wants it home to-day, it's a neighbour of yours, farmer Swift, you may ride it home if you like." The old miser consented, after having obtained the twopence to pay the toll-gate. While the old man was trotting leisurely along, occasionally nibbling at his brown bread and fat bacon, and wondering whether the son would pay Jack or not, or whether Jack would be in or not, or if Jack had neglected to lock the door, and anybody had stolen the bacon and ham while he went out to his sumptuous repast, or whether the pig had run away, or the barrel again leaked, or Jack in his ignorance, if paid, had chanced to take a bad shilling: while these and divers other thoughts floated through the old

miser's brain, bang went a fowling-piece, and off started the horse, soon leaving the old man's hat a quarter of a mile behind. Off sped the horse at full gallop, and while the old miser pulled with all his might and main at the reins, snap went the string which secured his coat, and as his arms were not in the sleeves, after his hat it flew. "Oh dear! oh dear!" exclaimed the old man, "hat and coat gone, I can never afford to replace them." On went the horse, until he came just within reach of the miser's own door, when seeing the young man who had brought the money, leaning and looking out of his own window, the remembrance of the ten and threepence halfpenny, nerved him with more than ordinary courage, and twining the reins tight round his wrist, he jerked at them with all his strength, suddenly pulling the horse up on one side of the road, when down the poor animal fell, as if by a shot, and broke both its knees on a stone-heap. Out came the man's son who had sold the horse—out rushed Jack with a rasher of ham, and a slice of bread in his fist—out flocked a dozen of the neighbours, all exclaiming that the horse was ruined—and up rode farmer Swift at the same time, declaring that it was not now worth as many shillings as he had given pounds for it that very morning. Farmer Swift threatened to sue the young man's father for the value of the horse—and the young man threatened the old miser with a law-suit for breaking the horse's knees—while the old man threatened that he would break Jack's bones for cutting into the forbidden ham—and Jack's father, who stood by, threatened to drag the old miser through a fish-pond if he dared to lay a hand on his lad, while he up and told them, how the old miser had sent Jack twenty miles the day before, and only allowed him a penny to pay his expenses with. Added to this, the instant Jack turned out the pig, it set off like a race horse, for it was nearly as gaunt as a greyhound, and where it had run to no one knew. How the old miser got out of his troubles you will

readily guess, when I tell you that it was twelve months beyond the usual time before he next took his twenty pound to the bank—and ever after that time he went by the name of “Penny wise and Pound foolish.”

Glorious news was that which arrived from Thonock in the Autumn, when uncle sent word he was going to gather in his apples; for, I can assure you, his was something like an orchard, not a little bit of a place shoved up in a corner, as if to be out of the way, but a great, large, square, wide, grass field, filled everywhere with all kinds of old English fruit trees. Then, you never saw such green, old-fashioned, strange looking trees in your life as some of them were, for they were knock-kneed and in-kneed, and bow-legged and hump-backed and round-shouldered; some leant on this side, and some on that; some had to be held, and others supported, by crutches; and many and many had their branches so heavily laden with fruit, that strong props were compelled to be put beneath them to support the weight. I cannot tell you half the names of the apples, and pears, and plums which grew in that old-fashioned orchard. There were codlins, and russets, and summerins, and rennets, and golden pippins, and ripston pippins, and lemon pippins, and the whole family of pippins; and large bell-tongued pears, and burgamots, and windsors, and jargonelles, and old men's, and old women's, and other sorts I cannot tell you of. Then there were plums, purple, and yellow, and green, and red, some of them with such thick stones in that nothing less than a hammer would break them; together with rows of damson trees, which, like the plums, had so many odd kinds of names that I dare not venture upon enumerating them. And, oh! what a treat to us boys was the morning which followed a windy night; what baskets and baskets full of all kinds of fruit did we then gather! There they lay upon the long grass, hundreds and hundreds, higgledy-piggledy together—here a red and rosy-cheeked apple, with the

sunny side uppermost, reposing by a golden goose-egg—a plum so ripe that it made your mouth water only to look at it. But light were the breakfasts, and dinners, and suppers, which we partook of in those days in the large thatched farm-house; for what boy was there ever yet found who cared about bread and butter, and meat and puddings, and such like things, while living in a land abounding with ripe apples, and mellow pears, and plums that melted like honey in the mouth? But if the mere windfalls afforded us so much pleasure, and furnished us with such a feast, just fancy what a treat it was to gather in the real fruit harvest of the orchard—to ascend ladders and clamber up



great branches—and climbing to the very topmost boughs of the trees with our baskets, there to pluck with our own hands the fruit which we had so often coveted when seen at a distance :

GATHERING APPLES,

which we had watched day after day changing from green to a delicate pale yellow, while on one side the sun threw in a few of his richest touches of finishing red—then to know whilst up there, we could eat whichever we chose—that we were sole king of the tree—that the apples were our subjects, and that every one we reigned over we could devour at our royal will and pleasure—and then, whilst giddy at the very thoughts of the power which we possessed, to come down, head foremost, basket, apples, and all, and lie sprawling amid the deep grass at the foot of the tree? Then there were the journeys to and fro into the great store-rooms of the old farmhouse—basket full after basket full to be carried up and spread out and arranged in rows, not one of which must be either battered or bruised, for they were set apart to be kept through all the long winter. In them we saw future pies and unboiled puddings, the comfortable windings up of many a cold dinner; and if we did contrive to give one a bruise, and another a pinch, and to let one of extra size and beauty now and then fall, we knew that on some future day, when we went up with aunt, we could pick out the very identical apple again, and then we had only to show her how this was going, and that one would not keep, and to throw in an additional “May n’t I have them, Aunt?” and so, by such pardonable policy, to become sharers of that rich wintry store? In vain did kind old aunt say that so much fruit was injurious, that they bred worms, and caterpillars, and all other kinds of creeping things; her kind words were but wasted, for, had all the worms “i’ the Nile” produced the flavour which that fruit did, and been in all the year, we verily believe that our first inquiry would have been, “How far is it to Egypt?” Then there was the pleasure of filling the baskets and lading the cart, and putting in the peck, and half-peck, and quartern measures, and going with John, the foreman of the farm, to a neighbouring town, the next market-

day, to sell bushels of the fruit, which uncle had neither room, nor use for ; and then John was so kind, and used to pick up some old acquaintance whom he knew, and so give them a lift on their journey in the market-cart ! Then there was the pleasure of going with John from shop to shop after we had sold all our fruit, which we sometimes did in one lot to a large huckster,—to go with him to the grocer's, to the harness-maker's, and to the cooper's, to call at the maltster's, and the hop-dealer's, then to dine in the parlour of the Old Rising Sun, and, when all was done, call at the mill on our way home, and bring with us the large sack of flour ! Then, as we rode along, to start a pheasant here, and a partridge there—to see the rabbits running into their burrows in the sand-banks beside the dark plantation—to see the hares limping across the silent stubble-fields, which were now cleared of the corn-harvest—and behold the swine feeding upon the ripe fallen acorns, under the huge old oak-trees, that threw their broad gnarled branches over the forest-paths—were a part of the many pleasures which I have found when residing with my uncle in the country !

I remember one of our moonlight adventures, in Autumn, was to capture a badger, which had often been seen in the neighbourhood of that very wood which I have described before, and we had never been able to discover the hole in which it hid, until it was pointed out to us by an old woodman. Now a badger is, no doubt, the bravest animal that can be found in England, in a wild state, and it takes a first-rate dog to master him ; and I have, before now, seen the badger conquer five or six dogs, when that cruel amusement of badger-baiting was so common in the country, about a quarter of a century ago. You will see, by the engraving, that he looks as if he could take his own part ; but I cannot describe to you the strength of his jaws, those of a dog are not to be compared to them ; once let a



BADGER

bite, and it is no easy matter to escape his hold, until he pleases to leave loose. We had borrowed a strong sack, which we placed in the badger's den, leaving the mouth of the bag outward, and open, and keeping it in that position, by bending a few light twigs across it. Then we had a running noose at the mouth of the sack, so that the moment his head struck the end of the bag, the opening was drawn up tight, and became closed, just as your own school-bag would do, if it was made with a running-string round the mouth, and a heavy stone dropped into it; the mouth of the bag, you know, would close up at once. But I must tell you that we had first watched the badger out of his hole, for it is his custom to hide in his den the whole of the day, and only come out to feed in the night, when he devours whatever he can find, either frogs, mice, roots, nuts, eggs, or birds if he can catch them asleep, great beetles, or even a snake, for nothing seems to come amiss to him. You never saw such a queer hole as he had made to get into his apartments underground; first, it went deep down, then it turned to the left, then went still deeper, bending to

the right, and seeming to go a little upward. You would not have caught us feeling and poking about his house in the way we did, had we not have watched my gentleman go out to his supper—no, no, we had seen one of his brethren before that day, and well knew what wonders he could work with those powerful jaws of his.

Having made the strings of the sack fast to the roots of some strong underwood, away we went with our couple of lurchers, making a wide circuit, that we might get beyond his haunts, for we had no wish to encounter him on his way home. We then set up a loud halloo, at which both the dogs began to bark—had you but have heard the noise we made, you would have thought Bedlam had broken loose. I'll be bound the badger had never heard such an uproar before in his life ; and that he thought it boded him no good ; and perhaps, poor fellow, before he had finished half his supper he began to lift up his strong black feet, and putting the best leg foremost, turned his sharp snout towards home. Perhaps, when he had gone a little way, our shouting and hallooing might cease for a few moments ; and he would pause beneath the shadow of the dark underwood, and say to himself, “ Dear me, it's very hard that I cannot have one meal in peace in twenty-four hours ; here have I, like a great silly broc as I am, been running away without having finished my supper, passing by a nice little shrew-mouse in my hurry, and two or three such fine plump frogs, and a beautiful desert of acorns, and hazel-nuts, real brown shellers, and all because of a little noise which is nothing after all, and—but, bless me ! it comes nearer—‘ bow, bow, ’ hey, I wish I had hold of you, I would change your note, but there seems too many to one ; and, oh dear ! they are nearly upon me, bless me ! how they come rattling through the bushes ; oh dear ! I wish my legs were a little longer, but a few more yards will do it, under this furze bush, and through these prickly brambles, how they do lug my poor rough jacket, now then beyond this fern,

and hurrah for my snug home under the bank; I wish you may catch me now"—and bang he went into the mouth of the bag; and what he said when he found himself caught in such a trap, I cannot undertake to tell you, but this I know, he had never been in such an apartment before in his life.

Oh! did n't he kick about! we could trace his sharp snout bobbing here and there inside the sack, as we stood in the moonlight; and after we had tied him up more securely, then came the question of who should carry him home? He might eat his way out; might bite us on the back, if we carried the bag over our shoulder; scratch a hole through the sack with his long sharp claws, and prove, to our sorrow, that we had for once caught a "tartar." There was only one safe plan, and that was to fasten a string to the bottom of the bag, and so carry him between us, leaving him to do his worst whilst he swung in the middle—although I much question whether we should not have thrown down the sack, and run off, had we but have seen his black and white head, and sharp snout thrust through. When we reached home, we were as much puzzled as ever: to leave the poor badger in the bag would be to smother him alive; then how were we to let him out? he might fly at us, bite a piece out of our hand while we undid the noose. Supposing we shut him up in the stable, or in the hay-loft, then how were we to get out without hindering the badger from running out at the same time? Something, however, must be done, and I undertook to liberate the poor beast in the stable, on condition that I should have the two dogs with me; this was acceded to. I then mounted astride one of the partitions which divided the stalls in the stable, and having loosened the string at the mouth of the bag, before I climbed up, held it fast by the cord which we had placed at the bottom of the sack, to carry it by, drew up the bag with the mouth downward, and out came the badger upon the straw on the stable floor. His first act was to bite one of the dogs, which began to whine and

cry out piteously, and the boy who owned the poor brute, threw open the stable door, to save his dog from being worried, when out rushed the badger in an instant; under the shadow of the hedge he ran, in the direction from whence we had brought him, and we never set eyes on him after; and glad enough we were, I can assure you, to escape as we did, without having had a taste of his sharp teeth. When taken young, the badger becomes as tame as a dog, will play with children, and show an affection towards those who are kind to him. Badger-baiting was very common when I was a boy: and nothing could be more cruel, both to the dogs that were set to "draw him" out of the cask in which he was placed, and to himself, though he seldom failed to punish his tormentors. But this barbarous sport is rarely ever heard of now, and I am glad of it, for all such revolting exhibitions only brutalize the mind of boys, and make them grow up into cruel men. Badger-baiting and cock-fighting are no longer heard of in England; and, in a few more years, they will only be remembered as the brutal amusements of a past age, as the bear-garden cruelties of Elizabeth's days are thought of now.

Although many of the flowers, like the singing-birds, have fled with Summer, a few still remain behind, and amongst these the Autumn crocus, from which the saffron used in dyeing is prepared. The wild mint is also in full flower, and a more delicious perfume we cannot stumble upon, than a whole bed of it in some moist shadowy place in the woods; nor must we forget the wild thyme, which is in full blossom on hundreds of little rounded hillocks and dry mounds, where it furnishes the bee with many a load of honey, after hundreds of the fragrant beauties, which ornamented our fields and woods, are withered and dead. Then we have multitudes of delicate harebells still left behind, so frail, and blue, and fair, and beautiful, shaking their bells, beneath every breeze that blows, and looking the more lovely because they seem to stand

almost alone. And now the heaths and hill-tops, that before looked to the eye so brown and barren, burst forth in all their bloom and beauty, for they are covered everywhere with the purple and crimson hues of the ling and heather. Oh! what a luxury it is still to be able to walk over acres and acres of these beautiful wild flowers! to see the rose-tinged purple heather stretching away for miles, as we have done in some places, sleeping like a great sea of flowers, whose waters were without either wave or ripple. Then there is the large ox-eye daisy, which may still be found in hundreds of fields and wild lanes. The common golden rod, and the yellow hawk-weed, which look not unlike the hen and chicken. Daisies have not yet disappeared from the landscape. On the borders of rivers and streams we still find the beautiful arrow-head; with its long, green, pointed, arrow-ended shaped leaf, and its pearly-white three-leaved flower, from the centre of which it is ever peeping with its eye of purple and gold. Nor must we forget that beautiful little inhabitant of the cornfield, the deep rose-coloured pheasant's-eye; which was called by the dames of ancient times the rose-a-ruby, and which is supposed to resemble the red rim round the eye of the pheasant: but of all our Autumn favourites none excel in beauty the little eye-bright; it is a cheerful-looking, bright, little flower, seldom growing above six or seven inches high, looking not unlike a beautiful white insect, marked with green and gold, resting on its dark back-ground of deep serrated leaves—the very fairy queen of all Autumn flowers. In the gardens, too, we have the beautiful yellow amaryllis, and many varieties of Michaelmas daisies, some of them rising to the height of several feet; and there a few of the large, broad, yellow sunflowers still linger, round which the bees hover all day long. In the hedgerows, too, still blooming amid the green and crimson berries, we find the flowers of the woody nightshade, or bitter-sweet; with the leaves

of its purple flowers bent backward, and its pointed centre projecting out, not unlike the top of a Chinese pagoda—but beware of tasting those ripe and crimson berries, for, though pleasing to the eye, and not at first even unpleasant to the taste, the consequences that follow are serious; and were you to eat many of them, I have little doubt they would produce death: but more fatal still is the deadly nightshade or dwale, whose berries are first green, then afterwards a glossy black, and are the deadliest poison that can be found in England, for the poison which one berry contains is sufficient to kill any person, and only this summer (1846) two or three persons died in London in consequence of eating the berries of the deadly nightshade. Never, on any account, lift these false and tempting berries to your lips; they resemble many things which you will find in life, pleasing to the eye, but when once partaken of, leaving a bitterness upon the palate, and a sad sinking about the heart. They resemble vice, clothed in the garb of virtue, presenting to the unpractised eye a pleasing exterior, but containing within only “dust and bitter ashes.” I must also warn you against those coral currant-looking bunches which hang upon the mountain ash, adding so much to the richness and beauty of the Autumn-coloured woods: these, also, are of a poisonous nature, and are commonly known in the country by the name of “poison-berries;” but in the country the little children, who string them and wear them for neck-beads, seldom or ever venture to taste of them, for as soon as they can understand any thing they are taught that they are poisonous. Nor shall I attempt to describe the bilberries or cranberries, lest you should mistake them for the nightshade; neither would I advise you to gather them, unless some one is with you, who has a thorough knowledge of the difference. Sloes and bullaces, which have stones in them, and grow on branches covered with sharp-pointed thorns, you cannot be mistaken in, any more than you can in

the berries of the wild rose and hawthorn, called hips and haws. These, together with wild crabs and blackberries, are perfectly innoxious, and free from all hurtful qualities. Numbers of butterflies are still hovering about ; the bee still continues to visit the few flowers that remain behind ; and occasionally we hear a bird or two singing somewhere amongst the bushes, like the last lingering notes that swelled the great anthem of Summer ; and the deep humming with which the air was lately filled has now all but died away. Each week the sun rises later from his golden bed in the east, and each evening sinks earlier into the western chambers of heaven ; but still the sunsets and twilights of Autumn are not excelled in beauty by any within the whole circle of the year.

During a walk in Autumn, almost every boy must have observed the web of the



GARDEN-SPIDER,

which is thrown from hedge to hedge, and bush to bush, across every narrow lane, hanging in scores over ditches, wherever a thistle, or a reed, or a stout blade of grass can be found, to form a pillar on which to fasten this wondrous piece of mechanism. In the morning, by placing yourself in a favourable light, you may see the little weaver work, from the first commencement of forming its net, until every spoke and circular mesh is woven as accurately as if it had been marked out by a pair of compasses. Having first spun a long line, or thread, she leaves it floating in the air until, blowing across, it attaches itself to some object opposite. When it has once caught she crosses it twice or thrice, each time adding to its thickness, until she has formed what may be called the cable, to which she attaches her web. This cable, you will often observe, hangs in a sloping line, which is caused by the current of air not blowing it straight across. Sometimes, however, the spider will throw out two or three of these floating lines, only selecting the one, for a cable, which she considers most favourable to her purpose. To test its strength, she not only pulls at it with her legs, but, suspended by a line, drops down the whole weight of her body from it; and you may often see her, while applying this test of its strength, swinging to and fro, like the pendulum of a clock. To strengthen the frame, in the centre of which her star-shaped net is woven, she attaches to the ends of her strong cables additional lines in a triangular position, as you would place the two broad ends of the letter V on two opposite walls in a room, that you might have a double attachment before you drew a string across from each of the points; but you will understand this by examining the engraving of the netted web of the common garden spider. In forming the centre of this curious geometric net, the spider has no other measure but her limbs, by which to lay out the accurate distances of these wheel-like spokes, and rounded meshes, by which they are intersected. These meshes always

vary according to the size of the spider: through the centre of the larger ones you might thrust a black-lead pencil without breaking a line; while, in the smaller ones, even the passing of a straw might disarrange the web. The spider generally, though not always, takes up her station in the centre of this wheel; when this is not the case, she may usually be found concealed beneath a leaf, or stationed at some remote corner of her house of business, ready in a moment to pop upon any casual customer who may chance to call in. Sometimes, however, a great, blundering blue-bottle will go in at the front door and out at the back, without so much as stopping to say, "Good morning," or to shake hands. We have been the more particular in describing the construction of this spider's web, as it is so common at this season of the year, that it must be familiar to you all.

Every boy, whether residing in town or country, must be well acquainted with Father Long-legs. He is almost as familiar a visitor as the common house-fly; day or night he walks into our apartments without ceremony, and if the candle is alight, he generally contrives to thrust one of his long legs into it; then, after making a few more circles round the table, he tries the other foot, which has a little grease upon it, to see how that will burn; and so he proceeds, unless he is unfortunate enough to get fast in the tallow, burning down every one of his long legs to the stump. We never see father long-legs walk, as he balances himself with his wings, but he reminds us of a boy practising his first steps in the stilts. Up goes one long leg, then he lurches a little to one side, down comes another, while his light body, as if settling itself into a proper balance, continues in motion; and just when you think he is really about to rest himself, off he goes again, all legs and wings, no bad representative of our Mr. Nobody, who has more mischief laid at his door within twelve months, than a whole school put together in the same space of time

was ever guilty of. What numerous thrashings has that Mr. Nobody saved us from. Talk about what our relations do for us! they are not to be named on the same day with Mr. Nobody; for he bears all—denies nothing—and the best of it is, never murmurs. What books he has torn—what quantities of ink he has spilt—what windows he has broken? If only one-millionth part of what is said of him is true, there never was such a reckless scapegrace—such a mischievous young rascal as that Mr. Nobody! But I was telling you about the crane-fly, or father long-legs, when Mr. Nobody came into my head, and you all of you know what a large family this jenny spinner has, for you must many a time have started a whole colony of legs, when you have been wandering out in the fields, and sent them skipping by thousands together over the tufted grass, putting, as we may say, their best foot foremost, and seeming to say, in their ungainly flight, as they jostled against one another, “I wish you would just move that long shaky leg of yours an inch or two aside, and let me pass, will you? What do you mean by straddling out that way, and taking all the road up? If I had but my shoes on, and I was n’t afraid of injuring my poor leg, I would fetch you such a kick that would send you into the middle of next week, that I would;” and away they go, one over the other, as if it was a matter of necessity that they should be constantly in motion to keep out of one another’s way. You would be delighted to see mother long-legs deposit her eggs in the earth. Away the old lady flies with her basket full of eggs, dropping one here and another there, wherever she can make a hole in the earth; and you know what a sharp-pointed tail the old lady has got, and you would laugh if you could but see her with her back stuck up, as she goes from place to place depositing her little black eggs everywhere, which look not unlike grains of gunpowder. You have no idea what a ravenous lot of little long-legs are left behind to provide for

themselves, as well as they can, when the Spring comes; for before they can either run or fly, while they remain under ground in the grub-state, they devour all before them; they eat away the roots of the grass and the flowers; the corn before it has pierced through the earth, and sometimes whole fields are destroyed by these hungry little long-legs, before they have even got a foot to run, or a wing to fly with. Hundreds of acres of pasture-land in one county have been destroyed by them, and left as brown and barren, and devoid of vegetation, as the smooth grassless sands upon the sea-shore.

Every boy has seen the little white maggots which are found in cheese, and which are the cleanest and most elegantly formed of all the class of insects, while in a grub-state; nor need any one be afraid to eat them, for they are perfectly harmless. But the most wonderful thing about the Cheese-hopper is the height to which it can leap, which is nearly thirty times the length of its little body. If a boy, according to his size, could leap as high as the cheese-hopper, he would be able to jump over the highest house in England. Before this little insect jumps, it bends itself into a circle, catching hold of the end of its tail with its hooked mandibles, then, throwing itself open with a sudden jerk, away it goes six or eight inches high, while the whole length of its body is frequently not more than a quarter of an inch. These maggots would, in time, turn to a very small black fly, with whitish wings; and one of these flies alone is capable of depositing from two to three hundred eggs in a cheese.

There is another insect called the Wheat-fly, which makes sad havoc amongst corn, sometimes seriously damaging the whole crop of a field. But such is the wonderful interposition of Providence that, while these insects are in their larvæ or grub-state, they are seized upon by another species of fly, with four wings, which belong to the class of ichneumons, who plunges the end of her sharp-pointed body into the grub of the wheat-fly, and there deposits her egg, where it remains until

the egg in its turn becomes a grub, that has been nourished by the body of the larvæ of the wheat-fly; but what is most singular, the ichneumon will not deposit its egg in the grub of the wheat-fly, if it has been already pricked by one of its own species. The earwig is also a great devourer of the larvæ of the wheat-fly, and it, in turn, falls a prey to other animals. Thus, you see, one insect lives upon another in endless succession; they then become the prey of birds, and so the destruction goes on, upward and upward, until they at last become the food of man. As it is on land, so it is with fishes in the ocean, and in rivers; the spawn of the large fishes is fed upon by the smaller fry, who again furnish a meal for the larger fishes, whose spawn they feed upon. A seed is dropped by a bird into the trunk of a decayed tree, and in that very decay the seed takes root, and thus we may sometimes see one tree growing out of another. Even a drop of water teems with life, and, by the aid of a powerful microscope, may be discovered within several species of animalculæ; and in that round silver drop, the same work of destruction is going forward, and the larger are found making the smaller ones their prey; even those which appear destitute of either limbs, or fins, or sight, possess some unknown power of perception, which guides them with unerring aim to the smaller species they feed upon. The very leaves which are whirled to and fro by the blasts of Autumn, which the rains and snows of Winter beat upon and rot, furnish a rich soil for the flowers of Spring; and but for this very decay, we should find the Summer woods devoid of many of their beautiful ornaments. Even the little fly has its mission to accomplish, and countless millions of these prey upon the decayed matter, which would otherwise impregnate and poison the air. For nothing was made in vain.

That little round bulk which you see suspended between the ears of corn that are still standing, and which is not larger than a cricket-ball, is the



NEST OF THE HARVEST MOUSE,

which is the smallest of all known British quadrupeds, only one sixth of the size of the common house mouse; for two harvest mice placed in a scale, will not do more than weigh down a single half-penny. Its little nest is beautifully constructed of leaves, and sometimes the softer portion of reeds. About the middle there is a small hole, just large enough to admit the point of the little finger; this is the entrance to the nest, which the mouse closes up when it goes out in quest of food; and yet this fairy structure, which a man might enclose in the palm of his hand, and which might be tumbled across the table like a ball, without disarranging it, often contains as many as eight or nine little naked blind mice; for even when full grown, the whole length of the head and body scarcely exceed two inches. During the winter months it retires to its burrow under the ground, unless it should be fortunate enough to get into a corn stack. It is one of the prettiest of our English animals, and

may be kept in a cage, like white mice, where it will amuse itself for several minutes at a time, by turning round a wire wheel ; its chief food is corn, although it will occasionally feed upon insects. How the harvest mouse contrives to give nourishment to eight or nine young ones, in that round and confined little nest, was a puzzle to that clever naturalist, Gilbert White ; and as he could not resolve so difficult a question, he imagined that she must make holes in different parts of the nest, and so feed one at a time. It is very amusing to watch the habits of this beautiful little creature in a cage, to see how she will twine her tail around the wires, clean herself with her paws, and lap water like a dog : it is the little tomtit of animals.

Even the common mouse, which is so great a pest to our houses, is an elegantly shaped little animal, although it is such a plague in the cupboard and the larder ; wherever man goes, it follows him ; let him build ever so princely a mansion, he is sure to have the little mouse for a tenant ; he walks in, we cannot tell how, and when he has once obtained possession, he is in no hurry to start again ; he helps himself to whatever he can get at, without asking any one's permission, and he never saw a carpet in his life, that he ever thought was too good for himself and his little companions to play upon. He is a capital judge of cheese, and were half a dozen sorts placed upon the shelf, he would be sure to help himself to the very best ; and yet in Wales they think nothing of catching this pretty little inoffensive pest alive, tying him up by the tail, and hanging him before the fire to roast, believing that the screams the little mouse makes while writhing in this horrible agony, is the means of driving all the rest of the mice out of the house. What noble-hearted English boy would not like to crack Taffy's head with a good stick, while he was superintending such cruel cookery ; for my part, I should think it no sin to hold his nose, for an instant, against the hot bars. None but a

person of most depraved and brutalized mind, could be guilty of such unnatural cruelty. But now I will tell you a story about—

THREE BLIND MICE.

There were three blind mice
 All sat on a shelf eating rice :
 " I say," said one, " Oh, isn't it nice ?"
 " I think," said another, " it wants a little spice."
 " My dear sir," said the third, " you are rather too precise ;
 Eat more, and talk a little less,
 Was our poor pa's advice,
 A truth he oft tried to impress
 On his little, brown, blind mice."

The old grey cat
 Sat on the thick rope mat,
 Washing her face and head,
 And listening to what they said.
 " Stop," said she, " till I've wiped me dry,
 And I'll be with you by-and-by,
 And if I'm not mistaken,
 Unless you save your bacon,
 My boys, I'll make you fly."

She pricks up her ears,
 And to the cupboard goes,
 Saying, " Wait a bit, my dears,
 Till I hook you with my toes,
 For, as I have n't dined to-day,
 I'll just take lunch, then go away ;"
 And as she walked quite perpendicular,
 Said, " I'm not at all particular."

Without any further talk,
 She made a sudden spring,
 And like many clever folk
 Who aim at every thing,
 She overleaped her mark,
 And in their hole so dark
 The mice got safe away.
 Said the cat, " This is notorious !"
 And she mewed out quite uproarious.

HOGS IN A FOREST.

But I have not yet done with the woods at this season of the year, nor shall I have space to tell you one half of the things I have seen in them during my rambles in the country.



HOGS IN A FOREST

in Autumn, feeding upon the fallen acorns, have a very different appearance to when seen in a sty! Running about amongst the underwood makes their bristly hides glitter like silver; and they have often a very picturesque appearance when seen beside the stems of gigantic trees, or breaking the deep green background with patches of agreeable light. Bloomfield, in his "Farmer's Boy," has given an admirable description of them, starting off at the rising of the wild-duck from a pool—how the whole herd set off, grunting and running as if for their very lives, through "sedges and rushes, and reeds and dangling thickets;" how, if they pause a moment, some one raises a new alarm, and off they scamper, helter-skelter, one after the other, squelling and squeaking as if they were about to be turned into pork. Those who live on the borders of

forests claim the privilege of turning their hogs out to eat the "mast," as the acorns and beech-nuts are called; and this custom dates as far back as the times of the Saxon, for in Domesday Book, which was compiled from actual survey, by the order of William the Conqueror, we find in the returns that were then made the number of swine which were kept within the different forests during Autumn. The swine-herd collects his hogs together in the forest from the different farmers around, who pay him so much per head whilst they are under his care. He generally selects some huge oak tree, round the bole of which he runs a wattled fence, woven out of the hazels and brambles of the underwood; and inside of this he forms a good bedding of fern and reeds, or long withered grass, such as abound in forest glades; taking care, however, to select a spot near some brook or pool of water, and also to provide a famous feast for his herd on the first day, blowing his horn lustily all the while they are feeding, and what with the noise he manages to make, together with the squelling and quarrelling of the swine over their food, there is such a concert got up as Paganini never dreamed of in his wildest flights.

For the first two or three days the swine-herd has to look carefully after them, to drive them into their forest-sty in the evening, and teach them where to go to when they are thirsty; and after this period he may leave them safely to take their chance, for although they are but a lot of stupid pigs, yet there are always found a few sensible enough amongst them, to find their way home to their bed under the huge oak in the evening, and whenever these lead the way the rest follow; and a pretty sight it is to see several hundreds of them trudging through the wild solitudes of a forest when the evening sunset gilds the mossy and weather-beaten trunks of the trees. Neither are hogs such an unsocial race as some believe them to be: they have their likes and their dislikes, like the rest of us; who can

forget Sir Walter Scott's pet pig, that used to follow him like a dog about the grounds of Abbotsford ! And even when ranging about the forest, and feeding on the yellow acorns, they will congregate together in different groups, forming a kind of friendship amongst themselves, which is never broken up whilst the mast-feeding lasts, for the same groups regularly separate from the herd, keep their own company, and return quite orderly in the evening, that is, in a well-conducted colony of pigs. Nor was the hog always a low animal grovelling in a sty : his ancestors were a fine-spirited race having the range of the forest like deer, and had often the honour of being hunted by kings—if it is an honour to be chased and worried in such choice company, for the wild boar was a dangerous and powerful animal, who used to sharpen his great tusks on the hard stems of trees, and run at whatever dared to oppose him. Many a noble horse has been ripped open by his formidable tusks in past ages, when he was a beast of chase in the old primitive English forests. What think you of a law which ordained that a man should have his eyes torn out if he was found guilty of killing a wild boar ? Such a law did William the Conqueror make about eight hundred years ago, and there is no doubt but that it was put into execution. And now they are talking about erecting a statue to this Norman invader, who was the cause of putting thousands of poor Saxons to death. There were wild boars in England, in the New Forest, no further back than the time of Charles the First, but they were swept away under the iron sway of Cromwell, who was a thousand times a better man than William the Norman, although he did countenance the beheading of King Charles, who would have beheaded him, if he had but found an opportunity for doing so.

It was a much nobler exercise to hunt a savage wild boar, than it is either to chase a poor fox, or a harmless hare, because the boar could, and did often, defend himself to some purpose ; it was either kill or be killed when they came to

blows with him, he neither gave quarter nor craved it, but made a bold rush at whatever opposed him; man, horse, or dog were often compelled to make way for him, it was death to dispute the path with him when he had once made up his mind for a plunge; and it was no joke to stand in the way of an old one, which sometimes measured between five and six feet in length, with great tusks sticking up sharper than the horns of a bull. Just fancy yourself coming home through one of those wild forests in the evening, and hearing a great wild boar sharpening his tusks on the iron stem of some knotted oak, making every dell and dingle ring again with the sound, wouldn't you have scampered off as fast as your legs could have carried you? Then if he had chased you, and you had climbed into a tree, perhaps he would have come just to have given his tusks another whet, or laid down to have a bit of a snooze, and get his appetite in good order against you descended. Not much of a treat to have gone a nutting in the forests in those days, with a prospect of being turned into brawn before morning; yet such was the England we now live in once: and beside the wild boar there was a pretty sprinkling of wolves—a company of customers one would fain have had no dealings with, if they wanted to bargain for a supper with one. Just fancy living in a nice little cottage near a wood at that period, first comes a boar and tries the door with his tusk—not quite like a watchman, who, when he has broken your sleep by sounding the shutters, consoles you by calling out “all right.” He goes, then up come two or three wolves smelling about, and serenading you with a few long howls, asking you, in their way, “if you have any thing nice for supper,” and not at all particular whether it was a dear old grandfather, or a little brother, or sister, in the cradle. It would n't have done to have played at “I spy” amongst the forest trees in those days after dusk. Just fancy what you would have done yourself had you lived then instead of now?

WILD BOARS FIGHTING.

Awful must it have been to have beheld those tusked and savage



BOARS FIGHTING;

and I have heard of two boys, who, while they were out nutting in Autumn, in one of the large forests in Hampshire, saw two of these monsters fight, while they stood behind a large oak to hide themselves; well knowing that the boars were too seriously engaged to take any notice of them. Oh! what an awful noise they made! as they retreated back for a moment, then dashed their hard iron foreheads together, meeting with such a clash as made the forest ring again. They bit, they snorted, their jaws were flecked with white foam, they ground their teeth together, they made their tusks rattle against each other, while their eyes glared like fire. You could not have believed the strength there was in those short, brawny necks, unless you had beheld them fighting; those boys fairly trembled again as they looked on—so savage and terrible was that combat. At length they fought with their heads down, each trying, if he could, to get under his opponent, and to tear him open with his sharp, projecting, and formidable tusks, which stood up like the points of scythes above those hideous and horrible jaws, that were now dyed over with blood and foam. For a moment

those two boars stood at bay, their eyes fixed, their heads bent, their muscular necks swollen with anger, as if each waited for the other to renew the combat, and stood on guard ready to receive and return the blow; round and round did they turn, front to front, each seeking an opportunity to pierce the flank of his adversary, and so, by ripping open his opponent, end at one blow the combat. The boar, that had all along stood so much upon his guard, that had oftener parried the blows than made the attack, had again drawn back, and stood full in the front of its enraged enemy, who had retreated to gather greater force, and now came along with a rush, and a thundering sound, which made the earth beneath his feet shake again! when in the midst of his career, just as he was in the act of holding down his head, to rush under and overturn his opponent, the other sprung aside, and in an instant drove his long white tusks into the flank of his adversary, and before he could turn himself, the blood rushed out of his side. But this only seemed to enrage him the more, for it was scarcely the work of a moment before he had ploughed open the side of the other boar—and there they lay bleeding and attempting to bite each other, long after they were too much exhausted, by loss of blood, to rise up and renew the combat. Whether they recovered or died, those two boys waited not to see, for they had hitherto stood powerless, and fettered to the spot through fear—not even daring to run away, lest their motion should arrest the attention of the enraged combatants. But these were not the real wild boars that infested our old English forests, and were hunted by kings and nobles in ancient days, though they fought savagely enough to have made the stoutest-hearted boy quail, and to have wished himself a mile or two away from the spot where they fought—for such were their strength and rage, that for yards around they had torn up the earth with their feet and tusks, as they rushed together in that terrible combat.

And now I must tell you a wild legend, connected with a

THE HAUNTED LAKE.

dark lake, which stood in the neighbourhood of a desolate and dreary wood ; wishing you, however, to bear in mind beforehand, that it is just about as true as the “ Adventures of Baron Munchausen,” or “ Gulliver’s Travels.” Still, it will amuse you, if read on a dark Winter’s night, in the shadowy gloom, by the fire-light ; and also, it will show you, that the conscience of a murderer can never be at rest, that he must ever be fancying he sees strange sights, and hears sad sounds, like the old man I am about to describe, in the little legend I have written, and entitled,

THE HAUNTED LAKE.

There is a wood which few dare tread,
 So still its depth, so deep its gloom ;
The vaulted chambers of the dead
Scarce fill the soul with half the dread,
 You feel while near that living tomb.

Deep in its centre sleeps a lake,
 Where tall tree-tops the mirror darkens ;
No roaring wind those boughs can shake,
Ruffle the water’s face, or break
 The silence there which ever hearkens.

No flowers around that water grow,
 The birds fly over it in fear,
The antique roots above it bow,
The newt and toad crawl down below,
 The viper also sleepeth there.

Few are the spots so deathly still,
 So mantled in eternal gloom ;
No sound is heard of babbling rill,
A voiceless silence seems to fill
 The air around that liquid tomb.

The ivy creepeth to and fro,
 Along the arching boughs which meet ;
The fir and bright-leaved misletoe
Hang o’er the holly and black sloe,
 In darkness which can ne’er retreat.

AUTUMN.

For there the sunbeams never shine,
That sullen lake beholds no sky,
No moonbeam drops its silvery line,
No star looks down with eyes benign,
The very lightning hurries by.

The huntsmen pass it at full speed,
The hounds howl loud, and seem to fear it,
The fox makes for the open mead,
Full in the teeth of man and steed,
He does not dare to shelter near it.

No woodman's axe is heard to sound
Within that forest night nor day ;
No human footstep dents the ground,
No voice disturbs the deep profound,
No living soul dare through it stray.

For shrieks, they say, are heard at night,
And wailings of a little child,
And ghastly streams of lurid light
Flash red upon the traveller's sight,
When riding by that forest wild.

For they believe blood hath been shed
Beside the tangling brambles' brake,
And still they say the murdered dead
Rise nightly from their watery bed,
And wander round the haunted lake.

'Tis said she is a lady fair,
In silken robes superbly dressed,
With large bright eyes that wildly glare,
While clotted locks, of long black hair,
Droop o'er the infant at her breast.

She speaks not, but her white hand raises,
And to the lake, with pointed finger,
Beckons the step of him who gazes ;
Then shrieking seeks the leafy mazes,
Leaving a pale blue light to linger.

THE HAUNTED LAKE.

But who she is no one can tell,
Nor who her murderer may be—
But one beside that wood did dwell,
On whom suspicion darkly fell—
A rich unhappy lord was he.

In an old hall he lived alone,
No servant with him dared to stay ;
For shriek, and yell, and piercing groan,
And infant's cry and woman's moan,
Rang through those chambers night and day.

He was, indeed, a wretched man,
And wrung his hands and beat his breast ;
His cheeks were sunken, thin, and wan,
Remorse had long deep furrows ran
Across his brow—he could not rest.

He sometimes wandered through the wood,
Or stood to listen by its side,
Or, bending o'er the foaming flood,
Would try to wash away the blood,
With which his guilty hands seem'd dyed.

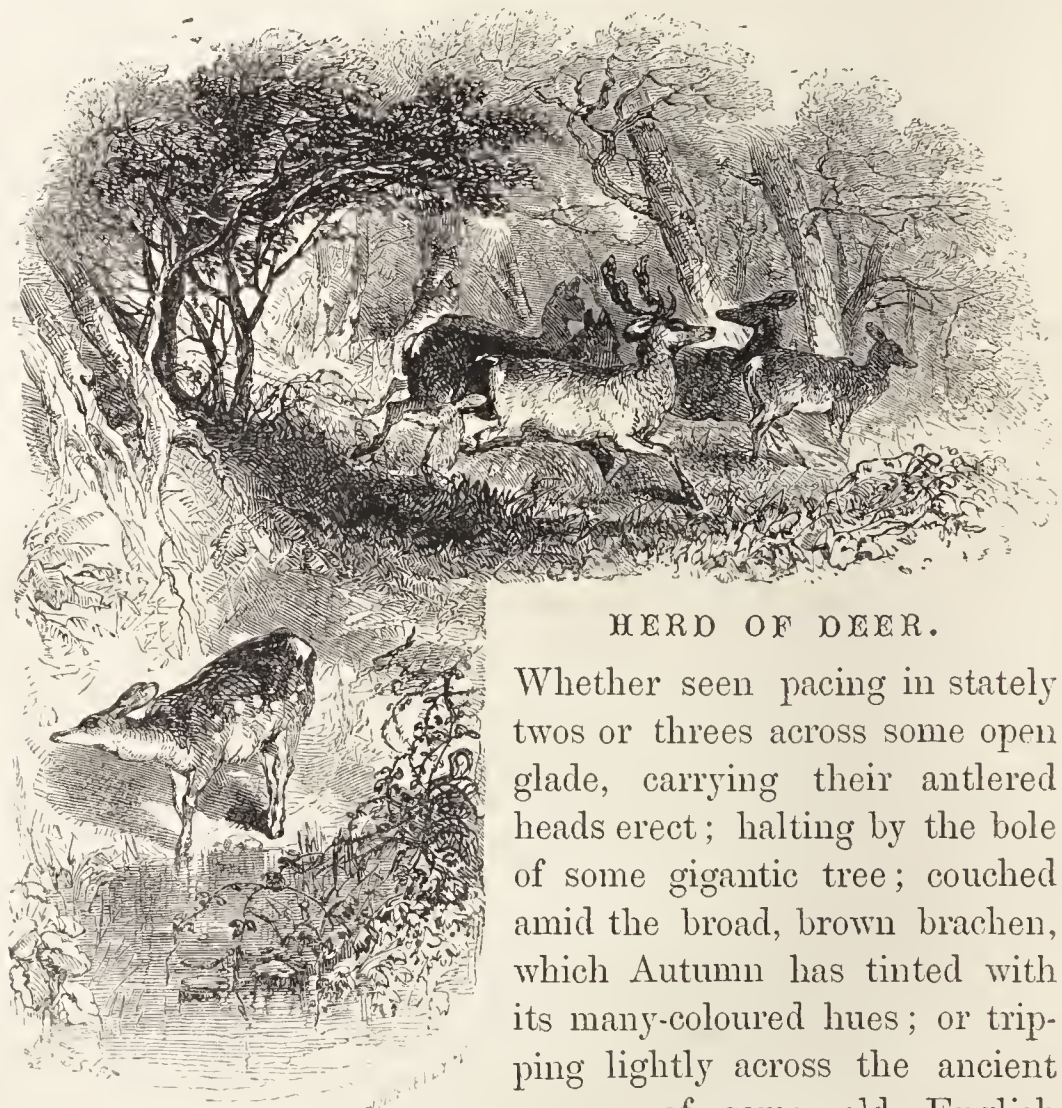
He never spoke to living soul ;
Oh ! how an infant made him quake ;
For then his eyes would wildly roll,
And he would shriek, and rave, and howl,
While thinking of the " haunted lake."

But that old lord has long been dead ;
The old hall is deserted now ;
They say he ne'er was burièd :
He died, but not within his bed,
And no one knoweth when, or how.

Such was the legend first told to me by my uncle, at Thonock, and for your amusement I have put it into rhyme ; and although it is all stories about the ghost, and the woman with her child appearing, still it is true that their bodies were

found in that lake, and that the man who was supposed to have murdered them, left England for many years, and then came back of his own accord, for he could not rest any where, so he confessed to the murder, and was hung.

No objects give greater beauty to forest scenery, than a



HERD OF DEER.

Whether seen pacing in stately twos or threes across some open glade, carrying their antlered heads erect; halting by the bole of some gigantic tree; couched amid the broad, brown bracken, which Autumn has tinted with its many-coloured hues; or tripping lightly across the ancient avenue of some old English

park, where they are so often seen—in whatever place the eye alights upon them, they fill the mind with images of pleasure. Then there is something so graceful in the form of the fawns, so innocent in the expression of their countenances, as they trot lovingly by the side of the hind or

RED DEER.

the doe, that we fancy such a sight must have softened the heart of the haughtiest baron that ever cased himself in cruel armour, whenever he looked down from the high battlements of his moated castle, and gazed over the vast landscape which stretched everywhere around. But out of all the noble and antlered race, the stag, or



RED DEER,

is our favourite ; for it is associated in our mind with Shakspeare,

the forest of Arden, and the melancholy Jacques, who gave utterance to such exquisite poetry—

“ As he lay along
Under an oak, whose antique roots peep out
Upon the brook that brawled along the wood :
To the which place a poor sequestered stag
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish: ”

it recalls the days when monarchs swept through the forest on foam-flecked steeds ; when the deep baying of the hounds awakened a hundred echoes ; and every dell and dingle rung again, “ while with puffed cheek, the belted hunter blew his wreathed bugle horn.” But the stately stag, the largest of all the deer that exist in this country, is no longer found in a wild state in England. Cultivation and civilization have made a prisoner of this old monarch of the woods ; and, instead of ranging free, for miles, over unbounded forests, he is confined within the enclosures of a few sequestered parks. On the heath-covered mountains of Scotland, only, does he ramble alone in his wild, unfettered majesty. But although the stag is the noblest looking animal of the species, yet the flat-horned, spotted fallow deer, loses nothing beside it, in comparison of beauty. Every boy who has visited Greenwich Park, must remember how tame these graceful animals are ; and few, we dare say, have gone there without making them partakers of their apples or biscuits : and what boy, in his time, has not possessed a knife with a buck-horn handle ? But the most curious thing is, that those large and stately horns which we see upon the deer, often weighing upwards of twenty pounds, come off every Spring ; and within three months afterwards, a pair, equally as large and grand, grow out in the place of the old ones, to be shed again in the following Spring. We should be astonished to see a plant in a garden shoot up to such a size, in so short a space of time ; and yet I can assure you that this

ponderous pile of bone, often grows to this enormous size in less time than I have stated. Deers' horns have been found measuring thirteen feet across the top, and six feet in length; but they belonged to a gigantic species, which are supposed no longer to exist. There would n't be much fear of such a gentleman as that walking into one's house. What a weight the poor beast must have carried on his head! and what a crashing he must have made when he ran thundering through a forest, clearing all above him for the wide space of thirteen feet! What a harvest would he but make for the old fagot-gatherers; if any rotten boughs but happened to hang in his way, what a rattle he would fetch them down with! Many a young bird has he sent tumbling out of its nest in his day, although he intended to do it no harm. Then his great forehead was a foot in width, and to have sat upon it, and rested one's arms upon the lower branches of his antlers, must, if he would but have allowed it, have formed a very comfortable seat. And should he then chanced to have set off at full speed, why, it would have been like travelling by the railway—not only as regards space, but the equal certainty that we should have been liable to accidents. There is another class of deer called the roebucks, possessing so fine a scent, that the hunters have the greatest difficulty in approaching them. If you saw one bound across a road when it was pursued, you would never forget it: just fancy its clearing twenty feet of ground at a single leap—and I can tell you this has been done by the roebuck many times before now. We sometimes see a good-sized pork-pie now—but oh! they are nothing to the venison pasties which our grandfathers made in the olden time. They thought but little of thrusting half a deer into a crust, that weighed two or three stone, in those days; then, making a clear space among the red embers on the ample hearth, covering it over again with the glowing wood-ashes, and leaving it all night to bake: and next morning a score of great, hungry fellows, with their coats

of mail on, and their helmets off, would sit around a huge, black, solid oaken table, and nearly devour all the pastry for breakfast, washing it down with huge wooden jacks of foaming ale, then, wiping the froth from their hairy lips, they would put on their helmets, grasp their spears, leap into their saddles, and sally out, ready to fight any one who dare assert, that the old baron whom they served, was not the boldest knight in England. But if you would know all about castles, and battles, and outlaws, and forests, and herds of wild deer, and herds of fallow deer, and the huge venison pasties they formed, and the brown ale they brewed in those days, you must read Sir Walter Scott's novel entitled, "Ivanhoe."

And now, lest I should weary you with too many of my descriptions of the country, I will tell you of a character whom we used to call Brandy-ball Jack.

Almost every country town and village have their celebrated venders of sweetmeats—from the little huckster's shop, where they profess to deal in every thing, to the distinguished manufacturer himself, who, as he cries his wares, wheels before him his little barrow, or cart, while he extols the richness of his hard-bake, tuffey, butter-scotch, peppermint, pincushions, sugar-sticks, bull's-eyes, and brandy-balls, and every other compound of sugar and molasses, flavoured with no end of essences and spices, and worked into such tempting forms, that hard, indeed, must be the palate of that boy, which would not melt and water at them. But of all the venders of sweetmeats, never was there one to approach our old favourite, Brandy-ball Jack, who was celebrated from one end of the county to the other. Ah! his was something of a cart—divided into partitions, and filled with every thing sweet that the taste could covet, while in the centre there rose up a huge mountain of hard-bake, so hard, that he was compelled to use a little brass hammer to break it up with: then he threw such lumps into his bright copper scales, and gave such bumping weight, tempt-

ing us to buy, whether we would or not, by thrusting the little bits he chipped off into our mouths, and calling out all the while, "A penny an ounce—a penny an ounce ; there never was such times ; this is made after the royal receipt, and is the very same that his majesty made his dinner of, at the last coronation ; a penny an ounce—a penny an ounce !" and many a poor boy, who looked on, as his mouth watered, and who had seldom a penny to spend, vowed, within himself, that if he were king of England, he would dine upon such hard-bake every day. As for his brandy-balls, he said that they were both victuals and drink, and that if a man was left all winter on an iceberg in the Polar seas, he would neither feel cold nor hunger, while he had a good supply of those brandy-balls.

Now, as old Jacky went from fair to fair, and from feast to feast, and visited in turn each merry-making, wake, and "statice" in the county, where his sweet wares were exposed to every shower of rain, and every cloud of dust that blew from the windy, naked highways ; our young readers may readily imagine what a nice, brown, gritty covering sometimes encased all these delicious things ; but as there is an old adage which says, that "every one in his lifetime is doomed to eat a peck of dirt," why we made no faces about the matter, but ate and champed away, as if a cloud of dust had never existed in the world ; and as many birds pick up large quantities of sand to aid their digestion, there is no knowing but what a good sprinkling of clean dust might have counteracted the effects of the over-sweetness of old Brandy-ball's confectionary. But once he had a lot that were too bad even for our universal appetites ; they had been rained upon, and blowed upon, wetted, and dusted, dusted, and wetted again, until they had accumulated layer upon layer, and strata upon strata, with every beautiful variety of grit and sand-stone, which is so much admired in geological formation, though any thing but fit to eat. Day after day, and week after week, did

this pile of brandy-balls remain, looking at last not unlike sand-balls ; and with every advancing week there came a reduction in price, from four a penny, we were offered five, six, and eight ; but though there was a decline of cent. per cent., still there were no bidders. They became at last a standing joke amongst us boys, and I cannot tell half the witty things that we said about them ; but all Brandy-ball Jack said was, “ They’ll be eaten some day :” and while we shook our heads in doubt, he, with a knowing wink, said, “ You’ll see,” and, to our surprise, we did see, for the great dirty pile every day grew less and less, although we never saw one sold. This, for some time, was a great puzzle to us ; but a greater still, was a new kind of brandy-ball, which he sold for six a penny, and so great a run was there for this new size, that there was but little call for the old four-a-penny brandy-balls. Strange, however, he could not supply us fast enough with this new article, for, as he said, they took a deal of manufacturing ; and, when we inquired what he had done with the old dirty stock which he had had so long on hand, he knowingly closed one eye, which was a great habit of his, and answered, “ Why, my lads, they’re selling like wild-fire, wholesale and for exportation.” Then it was noticed by all, that old Brandy-ball Jack did not converse so much with us as he used to do, and this one boy, who was keener-sighted than the rest of us, said, was owing to his having lately taken to chawing tobacco ; of course, he couldn’t be wrong, because he had seen the juice. But another boy, sharper still, noticed how often Jacky changed his quid, or chaw of tobacco, invariably putting the old one into a piece of paper, which he applied to his mouth, and then thrust it into his pocket. In the same mysterious manner was the new chaw put into his mouth, and for the life of us we could not discover what tobacco it was that old Jacky chawed. But time, that reveals many things, one day, when we were all gathered around his cart, divulged the mystery. He chanced

to pull his handkerchief out of his pocket, and with it there came three quids, all screwed up and still moist. In an instant a dozen hands were thrust towards them, for it had long been a dispute amongst us, whether it was tobacco or hard bake that Jacky chewed. When, lo, on unscrewing them, we found in each, two brandy-balls, the size of such as he sold at six a penny. We saw through the whole process of the slow manufacture in a moment—he had been sucking the dirt from off the old brandy-balls, which we had refused to buy at any price, and after turning them in every corner of his dirty mouth had sold them to us at six a penny. The murder was out—a dozen of us sprang upon him in an instant—we turned his pockets inside out—we compelled him to open his mouth, and every dirty brandy-ball that we found sucked, or unsucked, we made him swallow like so many pills. He made many a wry face, but we had no mercy upon him, until a very large one, covered with many an old crustation of dirt, chanced to stick in his throat, when thumping him on the back, until we brought the very tears into his eyes, we left him to his own reflections, discharging him as the Moor did Cassio in Shakspeare's "Othello," and saying,—

“ Brandy-ball Jack we lov'd thee,
But never more be sweetmeat man of ours.”

Brandy-ball Jack had hitherto been a great favourite with us, for he used often to amuse us with his curious stories, which generally related to himself; and I will try to imitate his manner as near as I can, while making you acquainted with the adventure of a pork-pie.

“ You see, my lads,” for so Jacky always commenced his narrative, “ I used to attend Nottingham goose-fair, ay, I may say, let me see, for this last twenty years; and during that twenty years I always dined at the Bell, and when I dined at the Bell I always paid a shilling for my dinner.

Now, a shilling for a dinner is a deal of money to a poor man, who sells brandy-balls ; so I thought to myself, thought I, one day : ‘ Now goose-fair lasts three days, and three days is three dinners, and three dinners is three shillings I’ll go out and I’ll buy myself a bit of pork, and a bit of flour, and a bit of lard, and I’ll make myself a nice raised pork-pie ;’ for, you see, I’d been making a great deal of hard-bake for Nottingham goose-fair, and I’d a good fire, and my oven was nice and hot, and I knew it would bake it beautifully. Well, although I say it myself, I made as nice a pork-pie as the king of England would wish to have sat down to ; I seasoned it beautifully, and so you’d have said if you’d seen it ; and I worked the meat about with my hands, so that it might have the same flavour all over alike, do you see ; which I consider to be a great secret in making a raised pork-pie ; for I can’t bear at one bite to get a mouthful of meat, and at the next bite a mouthful of pepper and salt, and nought else. Oh ! it was baked lovely, so nice and brown, I couldn’t sleep for an hour or two after I had got into bed for thinking about it ; and I thought to myself,—‘ Oh ! how I shall but enjoy it at Nottingham goose-fair, I can eat my dinner now without leaving my cart, or neglecting my business ; I can eat my dinner now, and cry a penny an ounce, at the same time.’ Well, you know, next morning I put my things in my cart, ready for Nottingham goose-fair : the brandy-balls here, by themselves—the butter-scotch there—the tuffey in this place—the black-jack in that ; and then I filled in with cure-all, and hard-bake, and peppermint pincushions : really it was beautiful to look at it, I’d done it so nicely. I’m sure if a duchess had looked at it that morning, she couldn’t have resisted buying either a penn’orth of bull’s-eyes, or brandy-balls ; and then I covered in and tucked it in all round with a nice, clean, white cloth. Well, you know, my lads, just as I’d got it all ready, and was preparing to start for Nottingham goose-fair, I re-

membered, all at once, I'd forgotten my raised pork-pie; and I didn't know whatever was to be done with it, for I couldn't think of unpacking my cart again; besides, it was full, and it would have been so much trouble. First of all I thought of putting it into my coat pocket, but as I must have put it in sideways, I thought it might break, and then all the gravy would have run out, and, you see, that wouldn't have done at all, 'cause it would completely have spoilt the flavour; so after a good deal of thinking, and turning it over in my mind, first on this side, and then on that, at last of all I decided on putting it into my hat, and placing it bottom downwards on the top of my head. Although it was a tight fit, I managed to stow it away very nicely in my hat. Well, my lads, after having arranged everything nice and comfortable, I set off for Nottingham; it was very early, and rather a cold morning, for the mornings do set in rather cold in October. Well, on I went, wheeling my cart, for, you see, I'd got five or six miles to wheel it before I got to Nottingham goose-fair, and although I felt very cold—so cold that, every now and then, I was obliged to stop, and beat my hands across my chest to warm them; yet, do you know, just as I got to Nottingham Trent bridge, I broke out all at once into a violent perspiration—never was in such a perspiration in my life. 'Bless me!' said I, to myself, 'here am I, all down from head to foot as cold as a frog, and yet the sweat's trickling down my cheeks in torrents—it's very strange!' Well, I kept wheeling on, and on, and on, sometimes stopping, and taking out my handkerchief to wipe the sweat off my face; but it was of no use, the more I wiped, the more I sweated. The sweat trickled down my cheeks, and on my neck, and along my back; all my hair was wet with it. 'Bless me!' said I, 'it's very strange, I never perspired so much in my life.' I'd often heard talk of cold sweats, and I thought to myself, 'Why, surelie, this must be one of those cold sweats, as they call 'em.' Well, do you know, as I got to Nottingham, it begun to go off a little,

and I thought to myself, ‘When I get to goose-fair, I’ll give my head a good rubbing, and then it’ll be all right.’ Well, my lads, would you believe it, when I got there, and took my hat off, I found, to my astonishment, I had n’t been sweating at all ; for the bottom of the pork-pie had broken, and let all the gravy out ; for, after all, I had n’t sweated a bit, it was only the gravy out of the pie after all ? Now, was n’t that very strange, my lads ?” Of course, we thought it was.

But I have not yet told you any thing about the history of the Dog : the most sagacious animal in all the brute creation ; the friend and companion of man in all ages of the world : ever true and faithful in his attachment ; as susceptible of kindness as any of our own race ; and, in many instances, displaying such a fondness towards its master, as causes it to mourn and droop after his death, and never, while it lives, attach itself to another. There are volumes of anecdotes written about the dog, describing his gratitude, perseverance, courage, faithfulness, sagacity, and devoted attachment ; all of which are so well known, that I shall confine myself to its history, and the description of the different varieties, which are, or have been, common to England. But, first, I must tell you that the true origin of the dog is unknown ; and that all our travellers, and writers of Natural History, cannot discover whence this faithful and domesticated animal first sprung. That there is a close resemblance between the anatomy of the wolf and the dog, is an important point, on which all our greatest naturalists agree ; and Hunter came to the conclusion, that the wolf, the jackal, and the dog are all of one species. And there are instances on record, in which the wolf has shown as much attachment to its master, as was ever evinced by the dog, by mourning, and sorrowing, and refusing to eat during his absence ; and leaping up, licking his face, running round him, and showing every mark of fondness to express its joy at the master’s return, after an absence of three years. And

after having carefully perused a number of works (along with many others), I have arrived at the conclusion, that the whole race of dogs have had their origin from the wolf; the greatest proof of which is, that when dogs have again returned to a wild state, and the young have, in the course of time, as one generation followed another, grown up, they have invariably borne a closer resemblance to the wolf; so, on the other hand, have they, in a domesticated state, and with particular care, merged into a strongly-marked and distinct breed, until we marvel, at seeing such contrasts as there are between the pug and the greyhound, that they have all sprung from the same origin.

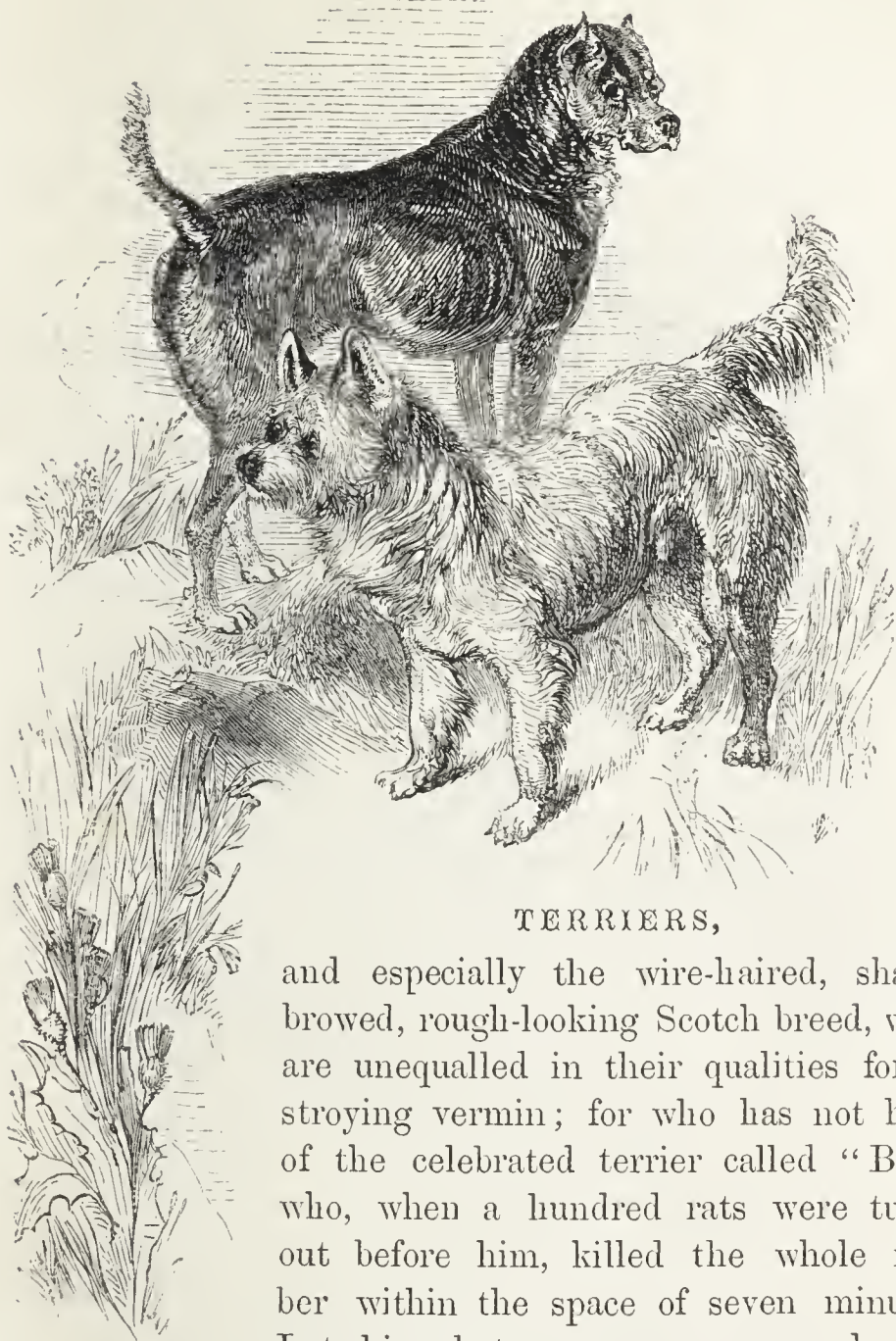
First, I shall tell you about the true old English Bloodhound, which was the dread and horror of murderers, and thieves, in the olden time; for when he once had scented the footsteps of the culprit, night and day would he follow him; no matter how intricate and difficult the path: through the thick and entangling covert of the forest, he went, step by step; in the cavern, and out again, over mountain, and marsh, and morass, to the very spot, by the edge of the river, where he had crossed, and when on the opposite shore, with unerring scent, he again pursued his victim; for no tree was too high, nor cavern too deep, but what he would scent out his way to the foot of the one, or the mouth of the other. He never seemed weary, never in a great hurry, he left not an inch of ground in the "trail" unsearched; if the door was closed, he quitted not the habitation in which the hunted victim was sheltered, but hung about the threshold, until the robber was captured. There is something about the breadth of his mouth, and the low hanging of his upper lip, which gives a sullen expression to his countenance, as if he was ever meditating some deep design, which that broad breast, and those strong, powerful limbs could without difficulty carry into execution, even although he had to trace his prey from the remotest corner of

Scotland, to the Land's End of England! Woe be to the felon on whose footsteps he is once planted! As soon might old age hope to escape the pursuer Death, as the guilty man to elude the track of the thorough-bred old English bloodhound.

Next in dignity and grandeur of appearance, comes the noble Stag-hound, whose strength and swiftness are only equalled by the kindness of his nature. With him the Saxon and Norman kings hunted the deer, in the gloomy old English forests of ancient days. He was allowed to bask before the fire in those grand old halls, which were decorated with armour, and antlers of the mighty stags he had torn down. Even the proud dais, where only the noble and the titled congregated, was not considered disgraced by the presence of the stately stag-hound; for, in those days, the murderous guns were unknown; and it was only by strength of limb, and swiftness of foot, that the stag-hound was able to come up with, and tear down the monarch of the forest.

Then comes the gaunt Greyhound, lithe of limb, and slender of body. He trusts to his keen sight and the swiftness of his long limbs, instead of his scent, to capture his prey; and no racehorse could excel his speed, in running up a hill. In former days, the greyhound was kept for hunting deer; and we find it on record, that when Queen Elizabeth was not disposed to join the chase, she would sometimes station herself where she could behold "the coursing of the deer with greyhounds." It is wonderful to see how nimbly a tall greyhound will turn the course of a hare, which it has once started. Right and left will poor puss run to evade its pursuer, but all is of no avail; and sometimes the chase lasts so long, that the hare will run until it drops down dead before the greyhound has reached it.

But of all our favourites amongst dogs, we must not forget the little



TERRIERS,

and especially the wire-haired, shaggy-browed, rough-looking Scotch breed, which are unequalled in their qualities for destroying vermin; for who has not heard of the celebrated terrier called "Billy," who, when a hundred rats were turned out before him, killed the whole number within the space of seven minutes?

Let him but once see a weasel, or a polecat, and death is its doom in an instant! To ferret his way through thorns and brambles, drive a fox out of its hole, frighten rabbits out of their burrows, the little terrier has not an equal; and, as for his eye, it is almost as bright

as a star, and sharp as the point of a needle. There is something very amusing in the countenances of some of the Isle of Skye breed : in the long, shaggy hair which overhangs their eyes, giving to the countenance, when in a state of repose, the look of a little, droll, old, white-haired man, in a deep study. We scarcely know a more amusing companion for a boy, than a good-natured, thorough-bred terrier.

For patience, endurance, and faithfulness, there is not one of the whole canine race that excels the Shepherd Dog ; on the dry, dusty road, in a hot summer's day, there he is panting, and barking, and keeping the flock together, while his master is perhaps half a mile behind, stopping to refresh himself at the roadside alehouse : faithful to his charge he still pursues his way—a carriage passes, he barks, and drives them on one side ; two or three of the foremost sheep take a wrong turning, he is up and running over the backs of the flock, and in an instant puts them to rights, then falls into the rear again, for his bark is the word of command to all that woolly and stupid regiment. On the moors and mountains of Scotland the shepherd sends out his colly with the sheep, far out of his sight, conscious that when he sets out to look for them, they will be found herded safely together. In snow-drifts, and dark nights, the sagacity of this dog is wonderful, and many a flock has been saved, which, but for the intelligence of the shepherd dog, must have been lost ; for he has been known to bring a flock of sheep many miles by himself, when they have strayed away. There are three varieties of the sheep-dog : as the Scotch, or colly ; the Southern ; and the Drover's dog—all, however, gifted with the same sagacity and intelligence ; and we have often been amused by watching their operations in Smithfield Market, to see how readily they have picked out a stray sheep, which had run into the midst of another flock.

There is something noble about the appearance of the

NEWFOUNDLAND DOG.



NEWFOUNDLAND DOG!

With what majesty will he draw himself up, as he looks with contempt upon the little spaniel which is barking before him, as if he seemed to say to himself: "You contemptible little puppy! if it were not for disgracing myself, I would just lift up my great broad paw, and fetch you such a box on the ear as would send you tumbling head

over heels into the gutter, that I would." Then he goes trotting on again about his business, without bestowing another thought on the snappish little spaniel that assailed him. What a good understanding there seems to be between him and the children ! What patience he displays while permitting them to pull and haul him about, allowing them to tug at his long ears and cling to his shaggy tail, as if they would pull it off ! Who like him to send of an errand with the basket in his mouth ? He would beat half the little boys at carrying a heavy load ; and woe be to the stranger who would dare to take any thing from him. As to swimming across a river, or fetching any thing out that will float, he is scarcely excelled by the thorough-bred water-dog. Nor is he less valuable as a protector of property ; let but a strange foot be heard about the premises he is set to watch, during the night, and he will fly at the intruder in a moment.

For a sweet temper and a forgiving disposition, there is no dog to excel the Spaniel ; if chastised, it bears no malice, there is not a particle of sulkiness about its nature ; give it but one kind look, and all is forgotten, for then its delight seems to know no bounds, and, to use an expressive phrase, it appears ready to jump out of its skin for very joy. Shakspeare in his beautiful drama of the " *Midsummer Night's Dream*," makes mention of the patient endurance, and unbroken attachment of the spaniel, even under ill-usage and neglect, where he says, " spurn me, strike me, neglect me, lose me, only give me leave to follow you as your spaniel." Not only in the field, but by the fireside, does it exhibit its willingness and devotion ; and there are instances of its lying down, and dying upon the grave of its master. Hitherto I have refrained from telling you any anecdotes, illustrative of the sagacity and devotion of dogs, as they are so numerous and interesting that it would be difficult to take a selection from them. I must, however, give you one, which was published in " *Daniel's Rural Sports*" many years

ago, as fully showing the faithfulness and unceasing attachment of the spaniel:—

During the French Revolution, a worthy old magistrate was dragged before the tribunal, under a charge of conspiracy. He had a favourite water-spaniel, which followed him to the gates of the prison, when the poor animal was driven back by the gaoler, who would not permit it to enter. Although the dog went back, and took refuge with a friend of his master's, yet every day at a certain hour did he appear regularly before the gates of the prison, where he remained for some time, until, at last, his perseverance and fidelity won the attention of the gaoler, and he was allowed to enter. The meeting between the dog and his master we cannot describe. Those who have witnessed the lively signs by which the spaniel evinces its attachment, will endeavour to imagine it. The gaoler, fearful that he might get into trouble for admitting the dog, was compelled to carry it out of the prison; but the next day it returned, and on each succeeding day, it was admitted for a short time. On the day of trial, in spite of the close watch of the soldiers, it got into the Hall, and lay crouched between its master's legs. When the guillotine had done its work, and the lifeless and headless body of its master lay stretched upon the scaffold, it was again there—for two nights and a day was the dog missing, and when sought for by the friend with whom it had taken shelter during its owner's imprisonment, the spaniel was found stretched upon its master's grave. For three months did this faithful dog come once a day, every morning, to that friend, to receive its food, and all the rest of the time was passed upon its master's grave. At length, the spaniel refused to eat, and, for several hours before he died, he employed his weakened limbs in scratching up the earth above his master's grave; and so he died!—in his last struggles endeavouring to reach the kind master to whom he was so devotedly attached!

Surely such an anecdote as this proves that, in spite of what Dr. Watts taught us in our infancy, dogs were made for nobler purposes than only to “bark and bite;” and, I trust, after reading it, no boy will ever again ill-use a dog. I know there is one great objection made to keeping these affectionate animals, and that is, a dread of hydrophobia. But a dog, well attended to, rarely goes mad, it is generally through having been bitten by some other dog; and when there are rumours of such being in the neighbourhood, the safest plan is to keep your own dog within doors, or to look narrowly after it when it follows you abroad; but, above all, to keep such as are of an even temper, and that will neither snap nor bite, unless provoked, and such are not at all difficult to find. Again remember, and never be unkind to a dog.

How pleasant it is to wander along the sea-shore, in the early mornings and calm evenings of Autumn; to look upon the wide world of waters, dyed with every hue of heaven; and to see the waves stretching out, like broad fields, in a distant landscape—here purple, there green; further on golden and brown, like lands sleeping in the fallow, or fields covered with the carpet which Summer throws over them, or yellow over with the ripe and nodding ranks of Autumn corn; for such are the changing hues of the ocean, when looked upon in the distance beneath an Autumnal sky, as Byron has beautifully described it in his inimitable poem entitled, “Childe Harold,”—

“ Fill’d with the face of heaven, which, from afar,
Comes down upon its waters; all its hues,
From the rich sunset to the rising star,
Their magical variety diffuse :
And now they change ; a paler shadow strews
Its mantle o’er the mountains ; parting day
Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues
With a new colour, as it gasps away.

The last still loveliest, till—’tis gone—and all is gray.”

Oh ! how refreshing and delightful it is



SAILING ON THE SEA,

at this season of the year: to feel the cool, cheerful breeze, and hear the low murmuring of the waves, as they roll gently upon the sparkling sand of the shore ; to see the broad water stretching for miles away, until it seems to touch the sky, and you cannot tell which is the ocean and which the cloud ; to watch the dim outlines of huge ships in the distance—now lost in the purple haze, then gliding along, through a broad gateway of gold, which streams for miles over the restless ridges of the molten waves—far, far away, till you might fancy that the ocean was an immense desert, trackless and untrodden, and bounded only by the low rim of the horizon ; to watch the slow, measured tread of the waves, and time their regular march, as they step upon the heels of each other, then throw their silver foam upon

the shore ; to walk below the tall white cliffs, on which a thousand tempests have beaten, and enter the snow-white caverns which have been washed by the waves of hundreds of winters. Should you chance to be there earlier in the season of the year, you might behold the fearless boys suspended from the giddy summits of the cliffs by a rope, held by their bold companions, who are taught to look upon the ocean as a nursing mother, that will some day rock them to sleep, while their lullaby is sung by the winds and the waves : or you might see some brave little fellow, in his short jacket and loose trowsers, thrown off from the tall promontory, above your head, and swing along the face of the dizzy cliff, while he searches every hole and cranny, wherever he thinks a bird is likely to build, regardless of the avalanche of chalk, and loosened soil, that comes rattling upon his hard head, as he is hauled up again by his laughing companions.

Oh ! how pleasant it is to ramble along the sea-shore, and gather the endless variety of shells which are every where scattered upon the sand at your feet ; to gaze seaward, and behold the tiny fishing-boats, riding from wave to wave, while the drowsy sails flap idly to and fro, looking as if they traversed the ocean in their sleep ; onward to wander, to where the bold, bluff headland has stepped forward from the receding coast into the sea, as if anxious to be foremost in the strife, and to meet the first bursting of the waves.

Beautiful appear those little villages, which every where dot the sea-coast, while the tall spire points heavenward, and the sabbath bell goes sounding far out into the wide and open sea ! Peaceful does the whole scene look in summer-time ! Sweet sounds the murmur of the waters upon the beach ; and pleasant appear the trees, as they sleep in the sunshine upon the steep headland : pleasant, also, are those clean, white cottages, through whose open lattices the sea-breeze brings refreshing airs, that have been wafted from

many a distant and far-off land; while, at their base, the waves ever break, in gushes of purple, and gold, and green—just as they are tinged by the various clouds which stoop over the sea. From these healthy homes, the hardy children watch the white sea-gulls, as they wheel and scream above the glassy billows, in which their broad wings are mirrored. Oh! how delightful it is, to stand gazing upon the long pier, whose dark piles (round which the clustering sea-weeds cling)-step fearlessly out into the deep swell of the waves: to listen to the glad greetings, and the low adieus, of friends, as they land from, or embark in, the ever-ready steamboats: to look backward upon the seaport town, and behold the anxious faces which are ever watching, from a hundred windows, seeking to pick out some dear friend, from amongst the numerous passengers, whom they can just perceive on the deck of the vessel, which is far out on the distant sea. Then to think, that in those large ships men can live upon the water for weeks and months together, without ever once setting foot upon dry land: that some sail away hundreds of miles into hot climates, where the heat far exceeds the most sultry summer's day we ever breathed in; while others steer northward into cold, frozen seas, upon whose waves ever float huge mountains of ice. One will soon hear the roar of the lion from the scorching desert—and the other, the growl of the bear in the Polar seas. Oh! how different to the green villages and pastoral homesteads of peaceful England! And yet these happy cottages, that now seem to stand like the abodes of peace, along the sea-shore, will, ere long, be shaken by the stormy winds of winter; and, in the dark nights, the inhabitants will be alarmed by the firing of signal-guns of distress; and, perchance, the beautiful beach, on which we are now walking, may be strewn with the wreck of some goodly vessel, which, at this hour, is proudly sailing on the sea; and lights will be seen glancing to and fro, and the fearless lifeboat rocking upon the high-heaving billows, and pale forms,

with drenched hair, will be borne up that narrow pass between the cliffs, while many, alas ! are left to sleep the sleep of death beneath the waves !

Pleasant it is to go out, with some brave old mariner, on the sea, in a



SAILING-BOAT ;

to ride along beneath the shadows of the tall cliffs, or past the long, brown, sandy sea-shore, listening to the murmuring of the waves, as they fall, with a sullen roar, upon the shingly beach. Nor ought we to forget those who are exposed to the perils of the great deep ;—for to them we are indebted for many of the comforts which we daily and hourly enjoy : for, nightly on the ocean, tens of thousands sink to rest, humbly trusting to that God who protects us on the land, for preserving them while sinking to sleep upon the bosom of the great sea.

Many varieties of birds may be seen in the neighbourhood of the sea. Great grey gulls, that hover above the cliffs, and mingle their shrill scream with the unceasing dash of the waves, as they wheel, with graceful motion, in the air. But there is one which may be new to you ; it is called the Shel-drake, or Burrow-duck, and is generally found near salt water ; where this curious bird, instead of building a nest, frequently deposits her eggs in some empty rabbit-burrow, or hole in the bank. It shows great affection towards its young, and when they are hatched at any distance from the water,

THE SHELDRAKE.

she will carry them to it in her bill, for they are able to swim when they have only escaped from the shell a few days. It chiefly feeds upon marine insects, sea-weeds, and small shell-fish. The



SHELDRAKE

is beautifully marked. The bill is red; the crown and back of the head a greenish black; the back white; and the breast varied with a beautiful belt of bay colour, narrowing as it passes under the wings, and surrounding the lower part of the neck behind. The wings are black and white, and some of the larger plumes of a glossy green, tinged with the colour of copper. Its motions in the water are very graceful; and there are but few prettier sights, than to sit on a bank and watch the sheldrake, as she sails about, surrounded by her young. If the eggs are taken away, and hatched under a hen, the young ones become tame, and are a great ornament to ponds or lakes. The eggs are white, and about the same size as those of the common duck.

I dare say you have often heard of the yarns which old sailors spin, and how little truth there is in many of them. The one I am about to narrate, has just enough of the “possi-

ble" in it, to suppose that such an adventure might befall any one, though for my part I should be very reluctant to avouch for its truth. But I must tell it you as a relief to the long narrations I have given you on woods, and wilds, and green country-places; and sorry I am, that I cannot narrate it in the graphic manner of Bill, the old sailor, who had spent so many years of his life on the sea, and, above all things, delighted to tell us his strange tales, and hairbreadth escapes on the ocean, which at times partook so much of the marvellous, that even the country people, who will almost believe any thing, used to say, "That's too big for us, we can't swallow that, Billy." He used to tell them, that once while he was aloft, helping to reef the sails, he chanced to tumble head first overboard. There was a rope hanging down the side of the ship, Billy would say, and before any one was aware of it, I laid hold of the rope, pulled myself up, and popped in at one of the portholes. I heard them lower the boat, and haul in the canvas to check the head-way of the ship; and then I heard the Captain say, "Poor Billy! he's told his last lie—he's gone." "Has he?" thought I, "we shall see!" and I began to peep about me, and found I'd got into the store-room. I saw a lot of new sails rolled up in a corner, "That'll do for a bed," thought I; there was plenty of beef, biscuits, cheese, barrels of ale, porter, every thing—"I can't be in better quarters," thought I, and then I began to ask myself a few questions. "Billy," said I, "you can't be better off than where you are; the ship will be, at least, a fortnight before she reaches the end of her voyage, and if you come out, Billy, you'll have to work as hard as any other man in the ship; and if you were to fall overboard again, Billy, perhaps you would n't escape so well next time; so I think you can't be better off than where you are." Well, I thought I couldn't do better than take the advice I'd given myself. I'd the very best of every thing to eat and drink, a good bed to sleep upon—and what more could I desire? I could hear them scrubbing the decks,

and taking in the sails, and running about overhead; and very comfortable it was I can assure you, to peep out of the port-holes, and look upon the sea, and lead quite a gentleman's life, and never do a hand's-turn of any thing. But the fortnight soon passed over; and one day, I heard the man who had the look-out, cry, "Land a-head!" "Oh! oh!" thought I, "it's time I packed up my traps, and started off, if it's come to this,"—for I knew we were near the end of the voyage. I was a good swimmer, and, as the sea was now calm, I let myself gently down out of the port-hole, and dropped behind the stern of the ship, when I began to holla out as loudly as ever I could, 'Throw me a rope! throw me a rope!' They, thinking it was one of the sailors who had fallen overboard, threw out a rope in an instant—and I was hauled on deck in a twinkling; you should have seen how they stared at me! "Why," said the Captain, "you fell overboard above a thousand miles off, a fortnight ago!" "What of that?" said I, "I got into a good strong current, had a favourable wind, and perseverance and courage does wonders." "But what did you live on?" says he. "Sharks, dolphins, and such like things," says I; "anything I could catch. One of the latter gentlemen took me in tow for two or three hundred miles, same as he did Jack Amphion that we read about—you remember it—a good many years ago." They all thought it very strange, and the crew used to look at me out of the corners of their eyes, as if to say, what a fib! but they knew no more about where I had been to than a marling-spike.

Well, you know, at last we landed, and one evening while the Captain was at supper with the Governor of the Island, he happened to tell him about my falling overboard, being out at sea for a fortnight, and swimming after the ship for a thousand miles. "I've got a black nigger," says the Governor, "that I'll back to swim against him for a hundred pounds." "Done," said the Captain, and he accepted the bet. A pretty way I was

in when he told me ; for I 'd heard of the black fellow, and I knew I stood no chance with him. "Never mind, Captain," said I, "you shall win"—but how I didn't know. I made up my mind to run away, but the Captain was too deep—he 'd set a watch over me—"I must brazen it out," thought I ; and so I did. Next morning I went ashore in a boat, and there was the black fellow kicking up his heels on the sand, and saying, "Come along, massa, me beat you—me beat you!" "Stop a bit, blacky," said I, as I began to strip ; when ready I asked my messmates to roll me the two large casks out of the boat. They did ; and Sambo, rolling up the whites of his eyes, said, "What for massa want casks ?" "What for?" said I, "do you think I'm going out to swim for a fortnight without taking a good stock of beef and biscuits with me." "Swim for two week," stammered Sambo, and off he ran somewhere into the island, and was never heard of afterwards. The Captain won.

"Hey! hey! Billy," the



FISHERMEN ON THE BEACH

would exclaim, "the Captain and the crew, too, must have been land-lubbers to have swallowed such a yarn as you spun them. I wonder you didn't meet with a mermaid, and bring her on board with you, one would have been about as likely as the other." But Billy cared not for such remarks as those, and he was a great favourite amongst the fishermen, and the villagers who dwelt beside the sea-shore.

Autumn was always a grand season with us, for it brought with it our great Michaelmas Fair, with all its shows, wild-beasts, horse-riders, waxworks, tumblers, giants, dwarfs, and wild Indians; to see which we had long saved up our money, and often talked about those we should visit, and wondered if such and such caravans would come again, and on what day, and how far we should go out of town to meet them. Oh! a busy time with us boys was that great Michaelmas Fair. First we had to go out and meet the shows, and we believed that each of those large caravans contained all the wild beasts that were painted on the front; and then what a delight it was to hear the great lion roar, every now and then, as they came along, while the tiger made answer! and to talk about what we should do if they broke loose, and to wonder whether or not they would eat us, or a bullock first, if we ran behind one. Then there was the pleasure of seeing them draw up in the great Mart-yard, as the large space was called, in which the shows had stood for many years; to watch them wheel up one against the other, until they formed an immense square; to see the butchers bring huge barrows full of beef, and to listen, as the raw joints were thrown into their dens, and hear them growl, and roar, and gnaw the bones; all the while wondering what this and that was, and trying to peep through some little hole to discover it. But the great marvel of all was the caravan that contained the elephant; oh! such wheels! it always came last they said, and filled up the ruts, and by so doing freed the whole procession of paying toll: then it was drawn by eight or ten horses, and with the caravan weighed—I know not how many tons. Then there was the preparation for opening, digging holes, and setting up poles, as high as trees,—such a hammering, and rearing of ladders, and bringing in bags of sawdust, and hoisting up great rolls of canvas, on which we knew were painted lions, tigers, leopards, zebras, antelopes, hyenas, wolves, bears, crocodiles, elephants, ostriches, pelicans, eagles, vultures, which

we were not allowed to see until the real fair-day came; though some were not rolled up so closely, but we could occasionally make out a part of the name, the top of a palm-tree, or a mountain, and read the gilt title of "The unfortunate Major Monro, who was carried away by the royal striped Bengal tiger," and we believe, eaten up at one meal. Then there were the king's beef-eaters, who went round the town on horseback, in dresses of crimson and gold, with such music as we believed only real royal beef-eaters could play: great trombones that went in and out, and a big green serpent, and bugles, and trumpets full of keys, which only wild-beast men understood—we gazed in astonishment, and wondered however they knew, out of so many, where to place their fingers.

Next came the horse-riders, men who could as easily stand on their heads as their feet, while the horse went round the ring at a brisk canter; who could leap through a hoop, and over a riding-whip, backwards or forwards; and all of whom we believed to be double-jointed. Oh! what tales they used to tell us, about their being kept in hogsheads of oil whilst young, and sleeping in oily sheets as they grew old, to make their joints easy, and soften their bones, until they could, with ease, have coiled themselves up in a bandbox! and we, simpletons that we were, believed almost every thing that the bigger boys told us, from the tale of the man who could dance on the slack rope on his head, to that of the Indian youth, who could hang by the edge of a single tooth on the slack wire: and I know not, now, whether such stories gave the inventors or the listeners the greatest pleasure!

But the front of the tumbling and conjuring booth, was, after all, the place to witness the greatest wonders; where the clown swallowed burning flax, as easily as he would have done a buttered bun, drew ribbons out of his mouth by the yard, and filled a basket with eggs out of an empty bag. Ah! those were wonderful things, until we discovered the secret of how

they were done, and then we only felt sorry that they were so simple and easy. And, oh! the wonderful pony inside, which when asked to find out the greatest rogue present, invariably came to his own master; and when sent round to discover which boy liked his bed better than his book, would, in spite of all the fillips we gave him on the nose when he attempted to stop, pick out some one from amongst us whom he caused to blush to the very ears.

Then came the grand tragedians, the stately kings, and royal queens, who walked about the stage outside, amid men in armour, and the ghost with the white chalked countenance! Ah! it was something like to see those perform; to witness the king seated on his throne; to behold the queen kneeling at his feet; to see him arise, and, as he folded his arms and knit his lamp-blackened brows, exclaim,—“Away with the traitor to the Tower!” Anon to hear the bell sound, and see the scaffold prepared, and look upon the grim headsman as he stood beside the block, with the axe in his hand; then to see the queen kneel again for the last time, and, when her tears were of no avail, give the crowned tyrant a touch in the side that seemed to kill him; while the knights in armour fought, and the town was set on fire, and the man with the chalked face popped up out of a trap-door in the midst of it, and said something which put them all to rights in no time. Nor was it less wonderful to see the king and queen walking together outside, arm in arm, a few minutes afterwards, just as friendly as ever, and the ghost chatting with them as familiarly as if he had never smelt sulphur, or stood in the midst of that awful mass of sky-blue flame.

Nor must I forget the peep-shows, with the green curtains that covered us in, the views which we saw magnified, battles on land and sea, processions, and shipwrecks, the falls of Niagara, that moved when the old woman turned a handle, and seemed to come rushing down a height of at least six feet. Then the mischievous monkey that was perched outside, and

that ate almost every thing we offered him: and all to be seen for the small charge of one penny; with something else, I forget what, for another penny, worth it all—either a pig-faced lady, or a mermaid, or a wild man of the prairie, just according to the number who paid, and waited whilst her husband changed himself into either the one or the other, for the old impostor personified the whole three. Oh! how they did deceive us boys at times! But, at last, this secret got blown abroad; and taking two or three of our larger comrades with us, we divested the savage Indian of his club, pulled off his horsehair wig and black mask, and found underneath the little man, named plain John Thompson, who owned the wife, and the peep-show, and never more in our town ventured to appear as either the pig-faced lady, or the mermaid. By the aid of a stout uncle, whom we had let into the secret of our suspicion, we hauled him outside on the front of the very little stage, sounded the gong and beat the drum, the monkey jabbering all the while, and the wife abusing us with all her might; and there we compelled the savage Indian to show himself gratis, having divested him of his mask and India-rubber gloves; while, with the palest face in the group, he begged pardon and threatened to prosecute us in the same breath. But instead of a warrant next morning, which he had vowed to take out, John Thompson and his peep-show had vanished, and we never beheld either the pig-faced lady, the wonderful mermaid, nor the savage Indian from the prairie again. Uncle William often laughed, and said, that “there were more difficult things to be done in the world, than to turn a black man white.” A similar impostor was found out at the Egyptian Hall, only a few months ago, who came out under the startling inquiry of, “What is it?”

Then, there were the gingerbread-stalls, stretching away to—I cannot tell you how far, they extended to such a distance. I never see such great gilt King Georges on horseback

now as were made out of gingerbread in those days. The moulds in which they formed the great stage-wagon, with its four horses; the cock, with his richly-gilt tail; the old watchman, whose lantern we always ate last—are all broken up or lost, and there is not an idea left, or a pleasant fancy to be found, in the flat, round, unmeaning gingerbread-nuts which are sold in the present day. The “Only genuine Stalls” have vanished; I miss the great round circle of wooden horses, of all colours, where we could, for a halfpenny, select either a black, bay, gray, or chestnut, all saddled and bridled ready for mounting, with chairs fastened here and there for the lesser children, who were too little to mount those fierce-looking wooden steeds; while we were whirled round, with merry shout and loud laughter, by the poorer boys, who worked inside of the circle, like horses in a mill; and, after having shoved, and turned, and perspired for a given time, they, too, had a ride for their reward. Then, to what a height the boat-swings were sent, in those days! When up, we could see over all the fair, could look down upon the stalls and the crowds of people—on all the hubbub of tin-trumpets, and penny rattles, and shrill whistles, and hollow-sounding drums, and queer nameless things, tied to strings, which, when swung round, made a buzzing noise like to a swarm of bees. Then, amongst the old-fashioned toys, there was Jack-in-the-box, who popped up every time you opened it; and snakes that came out such a length! and funny old women who churned; and ten-bells in a box that turned with a handle, and was sure to get out of tune after it had been in use an hour or two; for what boy could ever leave off, or resist lending it, whilst it made such funny music. And oh! the tables with white cocks and black cocks, and figures which, if the pointed arrow we whirled round stopped over, entitled us to as many nuts as the number below. How often did we try at the hundred, and come only at the one,—yet so near that we were tempted to risk another halfpenny; for the old man

with the wooden leg was so encouraging, and never failed to cry out, "Try again; very near; better luck next time, my boys." What things were to be won, if we could but knock them off the sticks,—and so cheap! six things for a penny—musical pears, and a nice little box; such a handsome pin-cushion! and a knife that, to look at, any boy would have given a shilling for it. Then, the boy that belonged to the man who owned all these treasures would try for nothing, to let us see how easy it was; and down he would knock the knife, and the box, and the musical pear, without one of them dropping into the hole, where, if they fell, they were claimed by the owner. Oh, it looked so easy, that we must try; so we did; and, alas! all the prizes invariably fell into the hole, as we shied away our pence and got nothing, so hurried off again to see the shows. We visited the giant, and the fat boy, and the dwarf, whose arm we had seen hanging out of the little wooden house, as he rang a bell from the upper window. We saw the fat ox, and the wonderful calf with five legs, and the sheep with two heads, and the man who swallowed a sword; all of which were things to be talked about for days and weeks after the fair was over. But the conjurer—the cups and balls—the brick underneath the hat that was changed into a Guinea-pig—the shilling that found its way back into the gentleman's pocket, after he had lent it to the conjurer—ah! these were marvels, and set us wondering for months after, and trying, but in vain, to do them ourselves. Then, there was the merry-andrew, so witty, who cared no more about a horsewhipping than if he had been beaten with a feather; and oh, how we laughed when he sold a simple old country-woman a penny packet of his flea-powder, which he warranted to destroy fleas: when, in answer to her question of how she was to apply it, he bade her first catch the flea, then force a very small portion of the powder down its throat; and when she answered, that it would be the least trouble to kill it at once, without giving the flea the powder, to

hear him say, that there certainly was some reason in what she said. They might tell us that the old woman and he were in league together; that it was all done to get up a laugh: but no, we will not think so; it looked too natural for that. But this was nothing to the trick two cunning rogues played off upon us, and got our pennies to buy drink with. First, they took the green-baize table-covering from out the parlour of the tavern, and hung it up before the stable-door, over which they had written, in chalk, "*To be seen within, that Wonderful Animal the WORSER!*" What could it be? we had never heard such a name before. Where did it come from? The man who took the pennies at the stable-door said, out of the clouds. The stable very soon filled, when a truly drunken, waggish-looking fellow, holding up a dog so poor that we could count every rib in its body, inquired, if it was not a very bad one. There was no denying but that it was. "Then, gentlemen," said he, pulling out the naked skeleton of another dog from under his smock-frock, "this is a WORSER;" and away he ran out at a side door. There was no help for it; we had paid money, and seen a worser—the very name had taken us in; and all we could do was to stand and laugh at each other. One old man said, the joke was worth a penny; but we could hardly see that: however, we were taken in, and laughed at by every body who had not, like us, paid for peeping. Many such tricks are played off in this world, and much may be learned from the "sights" to be seen at a country fair; for, unless we are wary, we shall be cheated by deeper jugglers than we meet with there; for there are those who are ever on the look-out, with their sleight-of-hand tricks, to practise upon the simple and the unwary, and soon convince us how much truth there is in the old, homely proverb, which says, "All is not gold that glitters." Not that I would wish to awaken a feeling of suspicion in your bosoms against every one with whom you may chance to come in contact, or think the worse of

the world because some merry vagabond does now and then cheat you out of your money, and then laugh in your face. Experience must be purchased; and when once we have bought it rather dear, let us be more guarded over the next bargain. A good-natured lad, who is once or twice cleverly taken in, will, without a feeling of anger, join in the laugh which is raised against himself. A trick or two may be overlooked; but a succession of them, played off on the same individual, would lay him open to the suspicion of being rather foolish; and it would not enhance his worldly wisdom, in the estimation of his companions, if he went to see a "WORSER" a second time. Above all things remember that gambling, on ever so small a scale, or however amusing or trifling it may appear, is bad, and has led to the ruin of many a one who little dreamed of its pernicious principles, when he first commenced it, amid the sports and pastimes of a Country Fair.

From the Country Fair to the rivers we must now turn; for during this season there may be heard a low twittering amongst the willows, which announces that the Swallows have begun to assemble together, and are about to set out on their long journey to some sunnier climate. Within the space occupied by only two or three fields, we have seen thousands of these birds collected together. They occupied the same situation for many days, invariably wheeling off every morning early in separate divisions, in search of food, and returning to the same place to roost early in the evening, always bringing with them an additional company. The habits of the swallow tribe are very interesting; and but few birds have attracted the attention of our naturalists so much as they have done. From their first appearance in the Spring, when only one or two were to be seen occasionally skimming over the surface of the river, to the building of their nests, rearing of their young, and up to the period of their migration, their habits have been narrowly watched from year to year; and as I shall have

to draw your attention towards the building, and breeding, of so many birds in that portion of my work which will be dedicated to a description of Spring, I shall take advantage of this almost songless season, to tell you all I think most interesting about the swallows. You have all of you, at one time or another, observed the swallow commencing its nest under the eaves, beside the windows, or at any projecting point of a building which it may have selected. It is an early riser, and commences its work soon after daylight in the morning, seldom building up more than half an inch or so at a time, then spending the rest of the day in flying about and searching for food, so that the work may become thoroughly dry before it is again proceeded with on the following day; for if the nest was formed as rapidly as the bird could build it, the very weight of the moist dirt, which it is compelled to use, would, through becoming top-heavy, fall to the ground, and so the bird would be forced to commence its work afresh. To prevent this, it only erects a small portion each day, thus allowing one layer to become thoroughly dry before another is placed upon it. It is curious to watch them at work, plastering away with their chins, and moving their heads to and fro with a rapid motion, clinging firmly to the brickwork with their claws, and also resting a portion of their weight on their broad outspread tail. Very often, during rainy weather, the cement which forms their nests becomes soft, and they fall to the ground; and, although this may happen when they chance to have young ones, which are all killed by the fall, yet so partial are these birds to one spot, that they will again commence building their nests in the same situation. Sometimes they will begin several nests without finishing any one but the last, which, when once completed, often serves for years. Many people are so partial to the swallow building upon their houses, that they have erected ledges for them, to build their nests upon. Some have let shells into the walls, and found pleasure

in watching the little bird build a buttress, or prop, beneath the shell to strengthen it, before commencing to erect its nest on the shell. Others, again, have rubbed the places, where the swallows were in the habit of building, with oil and soft soap, to prevent their nests from adhering to the eaves and walls. Such, you see, is the difference of taste, which there is no accounting for; though I should have preferred those for my friends and neighbours, could I have had my choice, who encouraged the birds to build about their houses, sooner than those who drove them away.

The swallow has always been one of my favourites amongst birds. When a child, I have watched them for hours while they erected their nests; they were my companions when I strolled along the river-banks to angle. I loved to see their shadows flashing across the water, like a ray of light—to hear their twitter on the eaves, in the early morning, long before I arose—to watch their young ones, perched in a row, and trying their little wings, for the first time, for flight. Then, to see them again gathered together, in Autumn, amongst the willows, beside my native Trent, from Ashcroft up to Lea Marsh, and all round by No-Man's-Friend, and far away to where the old chapel of Burton looked into the river—every bush and bank seemed alive with them, as if all the swallows in England had assembled together, in that spot, to chat together, for a few days, before they took their departure. And I have sometimes fancied that they said, “I wish the winters in England were not so cold; I don't like to leave the country where I have built my home, and reared my young. True the Italian skies are brighter, and the African air warmer; but there are no such sweet rivers there, no fields so pleasant, smelling in summer of sweet hay, and, until within these few weeks, yellow over with golden corn; no nice, comfortable, thatched eaves to build under, such as we find here in the English villages, which are surrounded with trees; no such

beautiful old spires to play round, and chase one another, when the rosy clouds of evening hang all about the sky; no sounds abroad so sweet as the voices of the cottage children in England, singing to please themselves, as we do, whilst they wander along the green lanes, and beside the pleasant hedge-rows, that divide one lovely meadow from another—but let us not complain: a few months will soon roll over; and when we return again, the pastures will be white with daisies; there will be violets and primroses upon the banks, and the cottagedames will smile when they hear our voices upon the thatched roofs; the villagers will begin to dress up their gardens again; and every body will exclaim, ‘The swallows and Spring have returned once more to our shores.’”

Autumn brought with it the Fifth of November; a busy day to boys in the country, and one for which we had made great preparation. Oh! you should have seen us make the Guy—what planning and contriving was there going on then, what old scarecrows were brought to light, that had vanished a month or two before from the corn-fields nobody could tell how! What stuffing and cramming there was to make him sit upright, to get his arm round, to bend his knees, and make his legs hang down as he sat in the chair, to prop up his head and make him look like the real Guy, who had courage enough to attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament! I never see such Guys now as we were wont to make. Stephen Grey would lend us his great jack-boots, which he wore when he went out to shoot wild geese and wild ducks in the marshes, on condition that we pulled them off and returned them safe, before we burnt Guy Fawkes in the evening. Then old Rollett, who had been a captain in the volunteers, would lend us his sword, and sash, and feather, as he had many a time done; and out of the three or four hats we had taken from the different scarecrows, we were enabled to make our Guy, a real, tall, steeple crowned one, such as we had seen on his head in the old

engravings in the History of England. As for a lantern, and a mask, and a bunch of matches, these were easily procured; and what with the bits of red and yellow cloth we had cut into stars, and medals, why we made such a grand, military, fierce looking Guy, that as old Dame Pindar once said, "She should not like to meet him walking along the lane that led to her cottage on a dark night, without her Lance was with her." He wanted neither for wig, nor mustaches; and as for his coat, we covered every rent which the wind and the rain had made in the corn-field, with gaudy decorations, made, when nothing better could be had, of richly-coloured paper. Then when we had finished him, and mounted him on the chair, what running there was to and fro, to fetch this and that farmer to look! and proud we were when their wives came, and brought their children, and held them up at arm's length, while we pointed out the stiffness of his white paper collar, and the frill that stood out at the front of his coat, which even the little knock-kneed tailor said was a capital fit, considering we had only straw and hay to make him from. What running in and out of the barn there was with the lantern to show our Guy to every new comer! what talk about the coming morrow! what reluctance to go to bed, and when once there, what difficulty there was to go to sleep! We never dreamed of any body breaking open the barn or granary door, to steal a few quarters of corn; but we had our fears that robbers might come in the night and carry off our Guy, for that we knew would be something worth stealing; and many a time did we get up and look out during the night, and with the first streak of morning light, bound down, too impatient to even unlock the door, but peeping through the crevice, with beating heart, were glad to find that he was still there.

Then the journeys we had to take to the great farmhouses, which were scattered here and there about the fields! the difficulty we had to get him over the stiles! the dignity with which

we bore him into the farmyard! and the jealous watch we kept whilst refreshing ourselves in the huge kitchen, for fear any one should run away with him! Ay! those were something like Guy Fawkes days, for we knew every farmer we visited; and in every house found a warm welcome; and the old grandmother would rise from her wicker-chair, beside the ingle, and take her horn-tipped staff in her hand, and give her spectacles an extra rub as she went out to take a survey; while she told us what Guys she had seen fifty years ago, and what a holiday the Fifth of November was then, when every body, who had any religion at all, went to church in the morning, and helped to burn Guy Fawkes at night; and how the old parish-clerk composed a new psalm for that day, as he thought the old one was not good enough; and that when he got up to give it out, none of them could sing for laughing, as he had made the last line much too short, and to eke it out was compelled to say,—

“’Twas on this day, this very day,
When villains did conspire,
To blow up the House of Parliament,
With gun-de-pow-de-hire.”

What a glorious night it was! what torches we had made! what grease and tar we had preserved for the occasion! what old rope was lighted, that but for the colour of the tar, looked very much like new! And all round the village-green, the bonfire flashed, dancing in golden rays upon the windows, and lighting up the tall trees, and throwing out many a white-washed wall and thatched outhouse, which on other nights slept in deep shadow; and oh! what secret hoards of fuel were from time to time brought out, which had been hidden for weeks between the hollows of hay-stacks, and in dry barns, and sheds, which stood out in the fields: many a paling that had hung loose beside a garden, and many a stake and post, that had once done service by gate or hedge, were slyly shoved under the burning pile, white ones coloured black, and black

white, and so changed and chopped, that even the very owners, who looked on, were unable to recognise them. Then there were the different kinds of crackers to let off—those which we threw down, and threw up; serpents that hissed, and rockets that went off when they pleased, and not when we wanted them. And oh! what filing had we done before-hand! in every old key we had made a touch-hole, and fastened them on sticks; and cleaned up all our brass cannon, and made fire-works of our own, that never would light at the right place, but went off all over at once, causing us to jump again with astonishment; and sometimes one got an eyebrow singed, and another had his hair set on fire; yet, maugre such little accidents as these, no serious harm ever occurred, for there were generally a few older heads near at hand, to see that we did not go far wrong. Poor old Sammy Sprintall was sure to be there smoking his pipe, and I well remember how we managed to get him to lay his pipe down, and do something at the bonfire for us; we took up his pipe, and placing tobacco at the bottom, and a small portion of gunpowder in the middle, over which tobacco was again crammed, how we watched him light it, and beheld him smoking away, until the ash burnt down to the powder, when bang it went, splitting the pipe-head into shivers, and fortunately doing him no harm; nor have I forgotten the thrashing the boy received who did it, and how grave we all looked, when told that it might have burst in old Sammy's face, and either cut or blinded him for ever. But we had never thought of this, and it was only afterwards that we saw how wrong we had acted. Such was our Guy Fawkes day in the country, nearly a quarter of a century ago; but a great change has taken place of late, and bonfires are now forbidden; and, perhaps, in another century or two, the cry will no longer be heard of,

“Please to remember,
The fifth of November.”

THE WATER SHREW.

If we keep a sharp look out, whilst wandering beside some large pond, we may chance to see the



LAND AND WATER SHREW;

the latter of which is a most beautiful little animal, with its back as black and glossy as velvet, while underneath, it is a clean, clear white. Look at its sharp snout, and long whiskers, and broad feet, so admirably adapted for swimming! You should see its back sometimes in the water, looking as if it was covered all over with transparent pearls; then, in an instant, as smooth and dry as if it had never wetted a single hair. Its motions are very graceful whilst diving and swimming, appearing at the top one moment, and seeming to oar itself along by its hinder feet, the tail extending out like a rudder, and turning every way as it turns, now here, now there; snatching at one moment some little insect from a floating leaf, then plunging under water and seeking its prey amongst the aquatic weeds at the bottom. When danger is at hand, it either runs into the hole

in the bank, and enters its little nest; or dives to the bottom for safety, where it cannot, however, remain long: and, by watching narrowly, you are sure to see its sharp snout appear again on the surface. It will amuse itself, for a long time, by swimming round some leaf, or drooping spray, that dips into the stream; and its smooth, silky sides seem to broaden out as it glides to and fro in the most beautiful attitudes that can be imagined. It is often pursued by the weasel, when, instead of running into its nest for safety, it plunges beneath the water; and, although the weasel is a good swimmer, he has no taste for diving, and so the little water-shrew escapes.

The Common Shrew, or Land Shrew, which every country-boy is familiar with, is another interesting object; and may be met with in almost every corner of England; and you seldom meet with two together, without finding them fighting. Shut a couple up in a box over night, and you will invariably discover, next morning, that one has killed and nearly eaten up the other. It is a great destroyer of insects and worms; and, if you look at its sharp-pointed nose, you will see how well it is adapted for rooting up the earth in search of its prey. Pretty and clean as it looks, and really is, it has, in spite of its pleasing appearance, a most disagreeable smell, strong and rank, and such as no one would like to have a house perfumed with; the very mustiest of all objectionable musks; so bad, indeed, that, although cats will kill them readily enough, they will not eat them. Some naturalists believe that the common shrew is eagerly devoured by the mole, and that wherever a colony of moles pitch their encampment, if the neighbourhood has before been infested by the shrew-mouse, one is seldom to be seen after the moles have burrowed there. This poor harmless animal was looked upon with great horror by our forefathers: they believed that if a little shrew-mouse only ran over their feet, it produced lame-

ness; and Gilbert White, in his "History of Selbourne," says:—"At the south corner of the playground, near the church, there stood, about twenty years ago (seventy now), a very old ash-tree, which had been pollard, that is, the top branches had been chopped off; and this tree was called the Shrew-ash." Now a Shrew-ash is a tree whose twigs, or branches, when applied to cattle, was believed to give ease to the pains any animal might suffer from the shrew-mouse having run over the parts supposed to have been infected; for our forefathers were so foolish that they believed if the poor harmless shrew ran over the leg of a horse, cow, or sheep, the animal so run over, would lose the use of the leg the poor mouse had been so unfortunate as to run over. Well, to prevent, or cure, this dreaded complaint, they bored a large hole into the ash tree, beside the playground, and into this hole they put a little shrew-mouse alive!!! then plugged up the hole again, leaving the poor harmless thing to die in the dark hole they had bored and plugged up in the ash. Was not this a cruel deed and a foolish act? to think that poor little shrew-mouse could impart any virtue, or charm, or healing power, to the twigs of that old ash; or that such a small creature could do any more harm to a horse, or a cow, or a man, by running over their legs, than a fly would had it settled down on the same place! Fancy our silly old great-great-grandfathers, with their spectacles on, gathered round a great tree, to see a poor little inoffensive mouse shoved into a hole, and buried alive there, and they foolishly believing that the twigs would afterwards cure cramp, lameness, and almost "all the ills that flesh is heir to!" One can almost fancy that these simpletons chanted some such rhyme as the following:—

ON BURYING A SHREW-MOUSE ALIVE.

Poor little shrew, we confess it's very cruel,
 To put thee in a hole so cold, and dark, and damp;
 It will save us, dear mouse, from taking so much gruel:
 Our lameness it will cure, and take away the cramp.

AUTUMN.

CHORUS.

Dear shrew-mouse ! save us from lumbago,
From hot fever, and the chilling ague ;
We look up to thee, buried in the tree,
To deliver us from all the diseases that there be.

GRAND CHORUS.

Twiddle-dum, twiddle-dee, we look up to thee,
Whom we bury alive in the gray old ash-tree.

In the early Autumn mornings, when we go out a shearing,
We shall very often wonder if thou art within hearing ;
And if we cannot see thee we shall still make our bow,
And consign to thy keeping each horse, sheep, and cow.

CHORUS.

The geese upon the common, the fowls around the house,
We leave to thy care, dear little shrew-mouse ;
Should gaffer or gammer be struck with cold or damp,
We look up to thee to take away the cramp.

GRAND CHORUS.

Tweedle-dum, tweedle-dee, we look up to thee,
Whom we bury alive in the gray old ash-tree.

Now do you not think that some such like doggerel rhyme would be quite in keeping with so silly a ceremony? And yet these very men, who trembled if a shrew-mouse only ran over their legs, possessed the bravest hearts in the world, in the midst of real dangers; though they shook if only a raven croaked, yet they would march up to the point of a spear; and cared no more for a drawn sword than they did for a straw. Such were among the superstitions of a by-gone age, when there were but few books; when not one in a hundred could either read or write; for many of you will remember that several of the great Barons who signed Magna Charta had to make a cross, so, **X**, because they could not write their names; and yet these men were the owners of castles, which were surrounded with parks and forests, and filled with herds of deer.

THE PHEASANT

There are but few birds, that frequent our old English woods, more beautiful than the



PHEASANT,

which, when full grown, is nearly a yard in length. It is almost impossible to describe the rich colours of its plumage, for we see there crimson, and gold, and green, and blue, and violet, all crossed, and barred, and flecked with brown and black, so beautifully blended together, that in some parts it is almost impossible to distinguish one hue from another. There is a look of majesty about this splendid bird as it is seen perched upon some bough, mingling its rich plumage with the variegated

foliage of Autumn. The pheasant is not a native of our old English forests, like the hawks and owls, that preyed and hooted there in the time of the ancient Britons, and flapped their wings above the heads of the long-bearded Druids, when they went out in solemn procession to gather the mistletoe, with their golden pruning-forks; for it was not until a much later day, and during the reign of Edward the First, that it was brought into this country. It is on record, that when Cræsus, the King of Lydia, demanded of the wise Solon whether he had ever beheld any thing equal to the splendour that surrounded him, the grave philosopher answered, "The plumage of the pheasant excels it all." The female makes her nest of withered grass and dry leaves, in which she sometimes lays from ten to twenty eggs. We have frequently discovered the nest of the pheasant through the loud crowing the male makes during the breeding season; and, in many preserves we have wandered through, we have seen the pheasants running about as thick as poultry in a farmyard, and even clustering about the gamekeeper to be fed. Pheasants, we believe, were made to be eaten: we sit down with less remorse to devour a great bird that weighs about three pounds, than we do a little thing, that hops from spray to spray, and cheers us by its song, and of which it would take, at least, a dozen to furnish a good meal for a hungry man. These it is a shame to kill; but a fine, plump pheasant, a goose, a duck, a turkey, or a fowl, we would sit down to without any more scruple of conscience than we would to a sweet little sucking-pig; consoling ourselves, like the inimitable Charles Lamb, while eating it, by thinking that it could never grow up and become a large, dirty hog, and go grunting and rooting about in every corner it could find. Many well-meaning people think it a sin to kill or eat any living thing—we belong not to that number—for we have the authority of Holy Writ to prove that these creatures were sent for the use of man.

THE PARTRIDGE.

The Partridge is another plump, beautiful, little bird, that helps itself to all within reach, and gets fat as fast as it can, by devouring the corn in harvest-time, as if it had a kind of intuitive knowledge, that its fate would at last be to feed man, so saw no reason why it should not partake of the best of the corn, as well as he did. Wherever cultivation spreads, there the



PARTRIDGE

is to be found; for, like the farmyard poultry, it seems to know that its habitation is near the abode of man, for it is neither adapted for prey nor flight, but by its gregarious habits, and half-domesticated manner, seems marked out as the food and property of man. Cruelty we abominate, as much as we do that maudlin mercy, which marks down a butcher as the chief of sinners, and considers it a crime to take away the life of either beast, bird, or fish. Lovers, as we are, of every thing beautiful in creation, we have none of those milk and water sympathies, which cause us to feel remorse after dining off a stuffed pheasant, or devouring a plump, well-fed partridge at a meal. Neither do we consider those laws just, which make these birds the property of the

rich alone—not that we think any man has a right to trespass upon private preserves, any more than he has to enter a garden or an orchard, and help himself to the fruit; but wherever these birds are to be met with, on the open heath, or the wide common, in fields through which ancient footways go winding along—the old free pathways which our forefathers have for ages trod—surely it would neither be robbing nor impoverishing any living individual, to capture the wild birds, or animals, which might be found there, without doing more harm than if we gathered the sloes and bullaces, nuts and crabs, from the wild trees and hedges.

Every boy, who knows any thing of the country, must be aware, that if a hare or rabbit is in a particular field or wood on one day, it may by night be a mile or two off, feeding on the cabbages in some poor man's garden. We can understand a man laying claim to a pig, an ox, or a sheep, but what right he has to a wild animal, or a bird, which is here to-day, and there to-morrow, any more than the poorest peasant, who may chance to meet with it on a common, we were never yet able to understand; and yet were the poor peasant to capture either the one or the other on the wide, open common, he must either pay a heavy fine, or go to prison. Sorry should I be were any one of you to attempt to take a single head of game; for, as the law now stands, such an act would bring you into trouble, and unjust as I consider the game law, whilst it exists it must be obeyed. My object is to show you, that beautiful as are our English laws, they are still capable of amendment; and that, although compiled by wise and learned men, like all other human institutions, they yet remain imperfect.

But I was telling you before I entered into this long digression, about the partridge, which is a very cunning bird, and will frequently squat so close, that it will trust to your passing its covert before it arises, although you are within a foot or two

YOUNG PARTRIDGES.

of its hiding place. The female makes but a slovenly nest, in which she lays from twelve to twenty eggs, which are of a light brown colour; and so close does the old bird sit on the eggs while she is hatching, that one gentleman records an incident, to which he was an eye-witness, where he saw the partridge taken, with her nest and eggs, and carried in a hat to some distance, without attempting to make her escape; and that even when the nest was put in a safe place, she still continued to sit, and there brought up her young. There are few prettier sights than a



COVEY OF PARTRIDGES,

nestling so closely together, that you might cover them all with a handkerchief; and you never heard such a “whirring” and rushing sound as they make, when they all rise together on the wing. The favourite food of the young partridges is ants’ eggs; and the old ones lead them to the ant-hills as soon as they are able to peck. The plumage is subject to great change, and will, at times, vary from brown to a deep cream-colour, and this change is most visible about the breeding season. The young birds can run as soon as they are hatched, and

have frequently been seen with part of the shell sticking to them. Some sportsmen say that when the female is started from her nest, she will hop away as if she were wounded, or her wings broken, so that she may draw off the attention of the enemy from her brood, by leading him to suppose how easily she may be captured. The same cunning is also attributed to the peewit.

Having told you a deal about frogs and toads in my description of Summer, so shall I now endeavour to make you acquainted with another class of English reptiles, beginning with the



LIZARDS,

or the land crocodiles, as they are called by boys in the country. The Common Lizard is a beautiful creature, and may often be found on heaths and sunny banks, turning its little head round the instant it sees an insect, which it springs upon in a moment; and, when once it is between its sharp teeth, it may bid good-bye to the sunshine, for it is soon swallowed by the lizard. You would be astonished to see how quick

it can run along a smooth, level footpath; and you will think it strange when I tell you, that the female lays her eggs in a hole, which she makes in the sand, and, covering them up again, leaves them to be hatched by the heat of the sun. But this, I must tell you, is only the case with the sand-lizard; for there are other species which bring forth their young alive; and, sometimes, you may see several together, for the old one is frequently followed by five or six of her young ones, which, like the peewits I before spoke of, are able to run about almost as soon as they are brought to life. Many of the lizards are very beautifully marked, being green and brown, and spotted with yellow and white, the white often rising from the centre of larger black spots, which run in a continuous line along the back and sides: and, what is very singular, if the lizard chances by any accident, to lose its tail, it grows again, although not always to the length which it was at first. Some of the lizards are very tame, and may be made to eat and drink out of the hand; while others, again, will try to bite you with their sharp teeth, and will speedily die if they are not liberated. Although the lizard can run along at a good pace, its legs are very short: the whole length of the lizard varies from five to seven inches. The under part of a lizard much resembles the chain armour which was worn by the barons of old: the throat is covered with scales, like the gorget worn by knights in battle; the under part of the forefeet is marked with smaller scales, such as we see on the armour of the arms; while all along, up to the hind feet, bears no bad resemblance to the hauberk, or shirt of mail, which covered the body: and who can tell but what some cunning armourer, of the olden time, may have made many improvements on the linked mail, through having narrowly observed the plated and scaly body of the lizard? You may often see them basking on a sunny bank, fast asleep; but, on the least alarm, they are off in an instant;

and, unless the spot where you discover them should chance to be open, you may hunt in vain for hours, without being able to find out their hiding-place. The blood of the lizard, like that of other reptiles, is cold; and it passes the whole of the winter in an almost lifeless state, neither eating, moving, and, to all appearance, not even breathing; nor is it until the warm weather of spring approaches that the lizard is again seen in action, seeming then as if restored to a new life: for, during the long winter, it has never once moved from its hole beneath the bank or under the tree, or disturbed the covering of dead leaves beneath which it concealed itself.

Mr. Bell, in his "History of British Reptiles," relates an interesting anecdote of a green lizard which he kept in a cage, and fed with flies and other insects. Into this cage he one day placed a large garden spider, which the lizard darted upon in an instant, and seized it by the leg. The spider instantly ran round and round the lizard's mouth, until it had woven a thick web around both its jaws: after having, as it were, tied up the lizard's mouth, the spider then gave it a severe bite upon the lip; as if to say, "There, take that for meddling with my leg." The spider was removed, and the web taken off; and, in a few days after, the lizard died, although, up to the time that the spider bit it, it had appeared in a perfectly healthy state.

Another class of reptiles, not much unlike the lizard in appearance, are Water-newts, or, as called by the country people, Elfts, and which, like the frogs, are mostly found in the water, or running about amongst the shrubs and plants which grow in the banks, or beside moist and damp places. The newt lives upon water-insects and worms; and hundreds of young frogs and toads are devoured by these reptiles in the tadpole state, which I have before given you a description of; and, when there is nothing else to be had, the largest species of newt eat up the smaller ones, especially the warty newt, which

NEWTS.

thinks no more of devouring a poor, little, smooth, or common newt, than you would of swallowing a ripe black-heart cherry, stone and all, at a mouthful. It is curious to watch the



NEWTS

swimming about in the water, steering wherever they please by the aid of their tail, while their legs are turned backward, just as a good swimmer turns his hands while throwing the water behind him. Nor is this all: they can just as well walk at the bottom of the water as either you or I can on dry land. The newts lay their eggs on the leaf of some water-plant, which they first fold together by the means of their hinder feet; and to this leaf the egg is as securely fastened as if a joiner had stuck it on with some of his strongest glue. The newt is much smaller than the lizard; for the smooth kind, which abound in almost every pond or ditch, are seldom found to be much more than three inches in length, and they nearly attain their full growth during the first year. The young newt is able to swim as soon as it issues from the egg.



HOP-PICKING

is amongst the last of out-of-door employments in Autumn, while for picturesque beauty it stands unequalled amid all the in-gathering of the Harvest; for there are but few scenes more pleasant to look upon than a hop-plantation, with its tall poles covered with broad, vine-shaped leaves, and hung every way with the graceful bunches of pale, gold-coloured cones, from which arise such a delightful aroma, that it is like sniffing the air in some green old forest on a sunshiny day in Spring, where every tree is throwing out its gummy odours. Yet how different to any forest is that spacious hop-ground: there is no tangling underwood beneath the embowering leaves, neither trailing bramble, nor armed gorse; but all below is clear as a garden walk, and all above green, and golden, and beautiful; where tendril leaf and bunch, curl, and spread, and droop, in a thousand pleasing and fanciful forms. Then to see the hop-pickers sitting or standing in picturesque groups: some stripping the bine, others laden with the poles, which are garlanded all over with leaves and bunches,

some helping to fill the hop-pockets, others bearing baskets—the smell from the drying-kiln perfuming the whole neighbourhood—the laughter, the singing, and the merry jest, have altogether such a rural, lively, and cheerful appearance, that we question if the far-famed grape-gathering in warmer climes, and under sunnier skies, has a more pleasing and poetical appearance, than an English hop-picking picture presents! What a gipsy-like look there is about the scene, as they collect together into little groups to prepare their meals, while the pot is suspended from three stout poles, where it simmers and sings, as if keeping time to the crackling of the blazing wood-fire, and the clatter of the merry voices, which are seldom silent; then the eye agreeably alights upon patches of white in the back ground of the scene, which tell, that some poor fond mother, in the midst of all her business, has found time to wash a few things for her children.

But of all the merry groups we meet with on the highways, none appear more light-hearted than the hop-pickers returning home: every little knot would make a picture, and there an artist would find every variety of costume, saving the last fashion. Men, women, and children pass along the road, clothed in old, weather-stained garments, which look as if they had stood the wear and tear of many a hop-gathering: one carries a kettle, another an iron-pot, a third a bundle; and we have even seen the little crib for the baby borne along on the head of one of the larger children; for it would not be left at home, nor would the mother have been comfortable without it, nor have sung so cheerfully, in spite of all her poverty, while at work in the hop-grounds. And often would she leave her work, and run to peep at that little face in the cradle, upon which the shadows of the leaves flickered as they waved to and fro in the autumnal sunshine. Even from London do children accompany their parents in

these hop excursions; and you marvel however those little legs can carry them there and back again, all the way from Maidstone, or Canterbury, to the borough of Southwark. Yet they will reach there somehow, pots, pans, kettles, bundles and all; for it is wonderful what a space of ground they get over by night, although their pace scarcely exceeds two miles an hour; and there is always some comfortable lodging-house which can accommodate them for one night, should those who have children not be able to accomplish the whole distance in a long, long day.

If you wish to inhale the true odour of the hop, rub a bunch of the cones through your hands. Oh, what a flavour you will inhale! and even your fingers will be stained with the yellow hue of the bines. Hops are supposed to have been used in brewing as early as the time of Henry VII., and probably much earlier, although they were not brought into general use until the reign of Henry VIII., or Elizabeth; not that I should imagine England was ever without the hop, as it is still found wild in a variety of places. In former days the young shoots of the wild hop used to be sold in the markets, and boiled and eaten with meat, like other vegetables.

Ale, you must remember, was the favourite beverage in those days, amongst all classes, who could either afford to brew or purchase it, for neither tea, coffee, nor chocolate were then known in England. Even the ladies at Court looked as regularly for their broiled beef-steak and flagon of ale at breakfast, as we do now for our bread-and-butter, or tea and coffee: and Tusser, an old verse-maker, recommends the thrifty housewife to boil her meat overnight, that her servants might have the broth next morning to breakfast. They used to kill the cattle in autumn, in those days, and salt them for the winter's provision. They did this in order to save the food which the cattle would have required to keep them throughout the dead season of the year. Salt fish was also laid

up in pea-straw for winter's consumption ; and, when it was very hard or dry, they used to beat it with a mallet, or a rolling-pin, before the fish was broiled ; and I have no doubt but that many of you have heard the old saying of "beaten like a stockfish."

Our next step will conduct us into the land of Winter, for the naked trees, and the old nests, which we see amid the branches, the absence of the flowers, and the shortness of the days, all warn us that the season of storm, and sleet, and frost, and snow is at hand. We hear the busy flail in the barn, as the thrasher pursues his heavy task, from morning to night, surrounded by the whole family of fowls, who are busy rummaging amongst the straw, and sometimes approach so near the thrasher's flail, that we marvel they are not knocked on the head. In the farmyard we see the cattle standing knee-deep in straw, as if wondering where all the sweet, green grass, and summer flowers, had gone ; and seeming to tell each other by their expressive looks, that they do not like the choking, chopped-straw, and dry hay, at all, and care not how soon they are once more hoof-deep in the rich clover pastures. We have now rainy days, and foggy nights, that come so thick, and so suddenly over the landscape, we can scarcely see our hand before us : fogs that spread over the fields like a great sea, and in which travellers lose their way, and farmers, who have taken a glass too much after dinner, turn down the wrong lane, and find themselves, at last, before some house, a mile or two away from their own homes ; when vessels run foul of one another in the rivers, and lamps in the streets only bewilder the passengers ; and old men cough dreadfully, as they pass each other ; while old women, with their heads down, bob their bonnets into one's face, and then say, "Lor, bless me !" and ragged boys buy a penny torch, dipped well in tar and turpentine, and, for a penny, suffocate any foot-passenger, who is good-natured enough to follow them.

But the greatest wonder of Autumn, is the number of birds that both leave, and return, to our country: we miss many a sweet songster, that used to warble in our summer walks, and, in place of these, we behold many a strange bird, perched upon the naked boughs: the snipe, and the fieldfare, and the woodcock; and in the marshes, and beside the rivers, we meet with every variety of waterfowl, which have come many a weary mile to winter with us, from the northern climates, as our summer birds do from the south in spring, to build and rear their young in our green woods, and pleasant hedgerows. Such cattle as remain in the fields huddle together for warmth, turning their backs to the wind and rain, and hanging their heads down as if they did not at all like such a change; but wishing that it were either colder or warmer, so that they might either be comfortably housed in their stalls, or be again nibbling at the summer-grass—any thing rather than starving upon this neutral ground of the year. The holly and ivy appear to have a greener look now, and as they attract our attention in the woods and hedgerows, we begin to think that merry Christmas is drawing near, with all its holidays, sports, and pastimes, and our next book will find us in the midst of them all.







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WINTER.--SNOW SCENE.







SHAKSPERE'S DESCRIPTION OF WINTER—ENGLISH ROADS AND ENGLISH TRAVELLERS IN THE OLDEN TIME—WINTER SCENERY: WIND; SEA-SIDE; LONELY PLACES—STREET CRIES HEARD IN A WINTRY MORNING—COMFORTS OF HOME—SNOW SCENE DESCRIBED: BOYS MAKING A SNOW MAN; CASTLES AND FORTIFICATIONS; A WOODEN HORSE; BULLWELL FOREST, AND POOR TRAVELLERS IN A SNOW STORM; SNOW DRIFTS AND ROAD-SIDE SCENERY: SILENCE OF THE COUNTRY IN WINTER; SHEEP AND SHEPHERDS IN THE MOUNTAIN-PASSES DURING A SNOW-STORM; VILLAGE CARRIER GOING TO MARKET; A CROSS COUNTRY ROAD AND CROSS PASSENGERS; LONELY PLACES PASSED BY THE OLD CARRIER; ETTY AND HER BROTHER, A TRUE TALE—HABITS OF BIRDS IN WINTER: TITMOUSE; THRUSH; BLACKBIRD; BUSTARD; AND GOLDEN CRESTED WREN; THE ROBIN, A WINTER FAVOURITE; A CHIRP ABOUT SPARROWS; WILD GEESE; DESCRIPTION OF THE WILD SWAN; HOW WILD DUCKS ARE CAUGHT, AND WHAT A DECOY DUCK IS—CATTLE IN WINTER; A FREEZING SHOWER; BEAUTY OF FROSTWORK UPON GLASS; PLEASURES OF IMAGINATION—DESCRIPTION OF A WINTER-FLOOD, AND HOW WE SAILED OUT AMONGST THE VILLAGES; OUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OLD MAN WHOSE COTTAGE WAS FLOODED—A KEEN BLACK FROST: ITS EFFECTS ON TRADE; RIVER FROZEN OVER; SKATING AND SLIDING; PLAYING AT BALL ON THE ICE; GRAND EFFECT PRODUCED BY THE ICE BREAKING UP IN THE RIVER; GREAT BLOCKS OF ICE—CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS; PREPARATION FOR CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS: HOLLY AND IVY; CHRISTMAS MORNING; VILLAGE WAITS; CHRISTMAS FEASTS AND CHARITIES; CHRISTMAS DINNER; SNAPDRAGON; TURN-TRENCHER; GUESSING

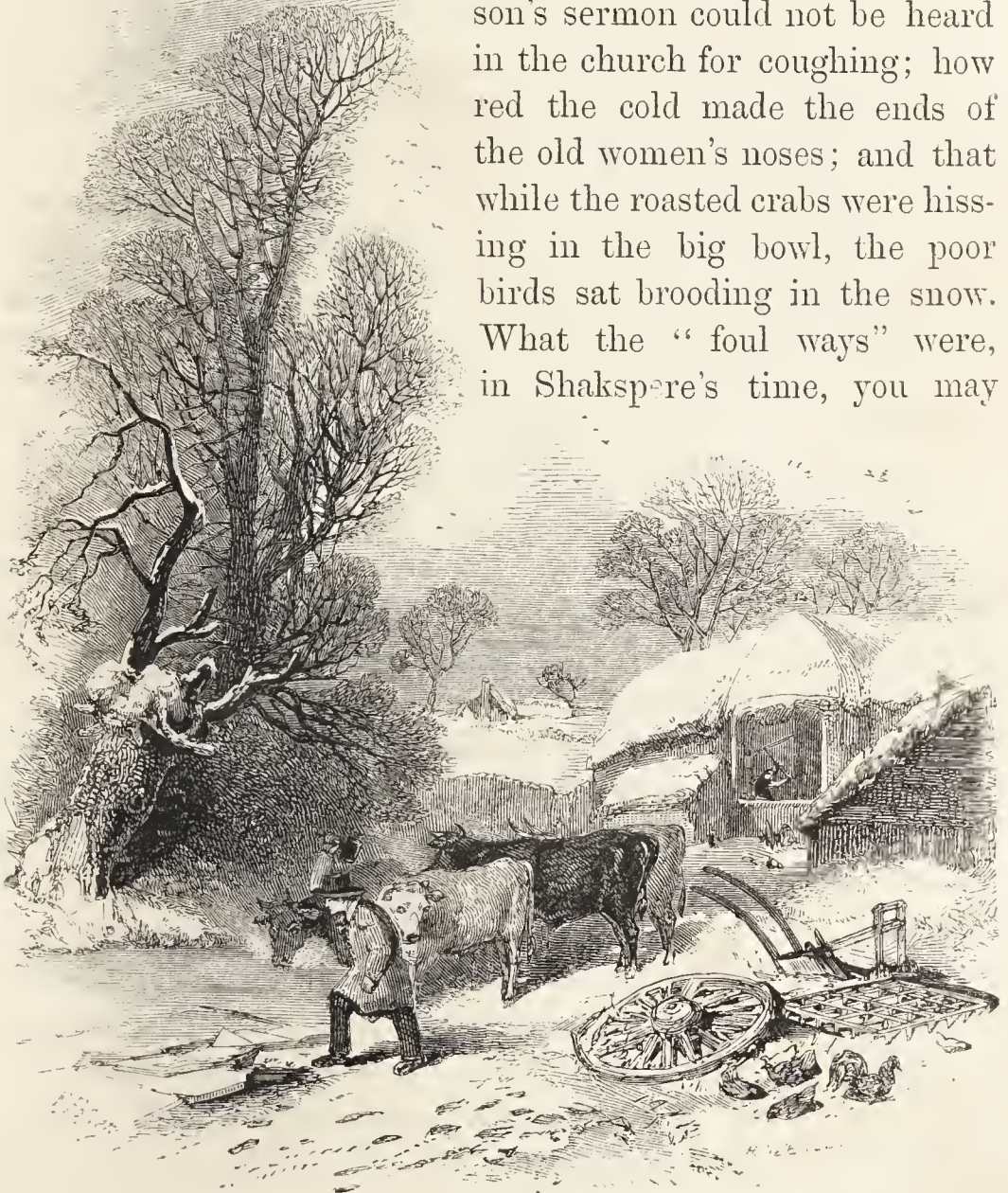
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“ When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail;
When blood is nipped, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
To-whoo; to-whoo.”—SHAKSPERE.

SUCH is the description of Winter, which Shakspeare has left us; and he further tells us how the parson's sermon could not be heard in the church for coughing; how red the cold made the ends of the old women's noses; and that while the roasted crabs were hissing in the big bowl, the poor birds sat brooding in the snow. What the “foul ways” were, in Shakspeare's time, you may



readily guess, when I tell you, that there were few highroads such as we now see; that there were scarcely any stage-wagons, and coaches were almost unknown; that merchants travelled from fair to fair, and from town to town, with their goods tied in great packages, and over the backs of their horses; and that the packhorse still hangs out, as an alehouse-sign, in many an old-fashioned country-town, in the present day. In the deep, miry roads, on a dark winter's night, might the jingling of their horses' bells be heard, as the sound was borne along upon the wind, while they threaded their way through the darkness, between the hedges, along such narrow roads as Hagbush Lane, which still stretches behind Islington, and out at the foot of Highgate Hill, and which, though not more than nine or ten feet wide, was, a few centuries ago, the great North-road that led into London. Then, and even up to within the last half century, bad roads, and snow, and rain, and wind, and darkness, were not the only things which those hardy wayfarers had to contend with in winter; for footpads, and daring highwaymen, mounted on fleet horses, lay in wait behind the dark hedges, and near the old crosses, and guide-posts, which stood at the corners of those ancient roads; and if one of the travellers' horses chanced to stick fast in these miry ways, or the traveller was alone, or benighted, or chanced to lose his way, out rushed one or more of the robbers, and out came his pistol, as he cut short all ceremony by exclaiming, "Deliver your money, or die." For, in those days, villages lay wide and far apart, and towns were dimly lighted with little oil-lamps, one of which stood here and there at the corners of the streets; and, on a windy and tempestuous night, these were blown out, and all the roads that lay edging upon the towns, were left in unguarded silence and darkness; for there were no mounted policemen to watch the highway, in those days, and to protect travellers. Such was the England we now live in, long after the time that Shakspeare had writ-

ten the verse, which we have prefixed to the heading of our description of Winter.

Now, instead of the faded foliage of Autumn, the hedges are shorn even of their withered leaves, looking bare and naked, saving where the scarlet clusters of hips and haws still hang, and the dark-leaved holly, and straggling ivy, occasionally relieve the nakedness with their green. We hear the wind howling about the house at night, like a hungry wolf, trying the window-shutters, and doors to get in; and, as if determined not to be disappointed of its prey, it enters the chimney, where it moans, and growls, and roars, as if it had stuck fast, and could neither get up nor down, into the warm, comfortable room, in which it is now really a pleasure to be seated. Then we think of the darkness which stretches over the sea; of the ships which are driven before the mighty wind; of shoals, and sands, and rocks, and wrecks; and great waves, that come moaning, and beating upon the beach, like hungry monsters seeking something to devour. We call up desolate moors, and lonely roads, and solitary toll-gates, standing at the corners of woods and forests; and bleak, treeless commons; places which bear an ill name: where travellers have been waylaid and robbed, where gibbet-posts stand; and all night long the irons, in which the murderer is hung, swing, and creak, and rattle again! and then it is, that we really feel there is no place like home. We think of the cold river side, and the frozen reeds and rushes, white over with hoar-frost; the icy ropes sailors are compelled to handle; the gardener chilled as he cuts greens, and digs up turnips half-buried in the snow; of the poor creatures who call cold “water-cresses” in the streets; of the little sweep, whose voice we hear in the keen frosty morning, long before it is light; and we feel thankful that we have got so comfortable a bed to lie in, and so warm a roof above our heads. Even the cry of “milk” tells us how early the poor woman must have risen; and we think of the many streets she has

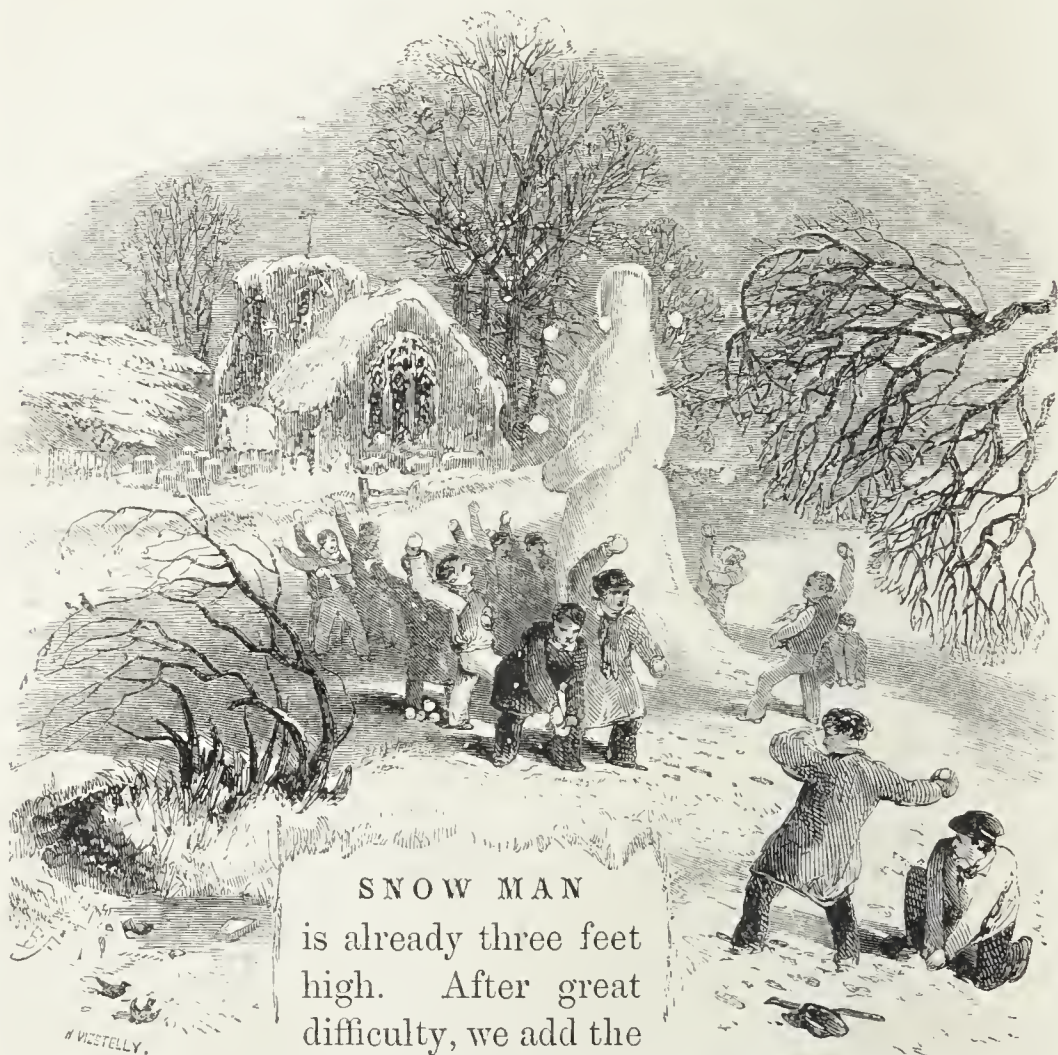
had to traverse, all in the biting frost, or snow, or through the thaw, before our breakfast-table can be supplied with this necessary beverage. Oh, if a boy were only to sit down and think seriously of these things, he would soon be enabled to estimate aright, all the blessings and comforts of home; would clearly see, how much we are indebted even to the very poor; and that, but for their labour, and attendance, we should be left without many things, which we now enjoy; that a house, filled with gold, would only be an abode of misery, if our fellow-men refused to administer to our wants; and that the largest estate, the wealthiest landowner ever possessed, would be worth but little more than a vast and barren desert, if he was left without labourers to cultivate it. Whatever, then, may be your station in life, always treat the industrious poor with respect and kindness; and you will find them ever grateful, and ready to serve you. For my part, I would sooner be attended upon, by the meanest beggar that ever wore rags, if he served me with feelings of affection, than a cold, selfish servant, were he kept, and clothed, and paid by another, and but waited on me, for what he got, without a feeling of attachment:—remember that “kindness begets affection.”

What a great change does a fall of snow produce on the face of the landscape! Overnight, we see the fields green, the trees brown and naked, the moss upon the thatched roofs of the cottages, and the winding highway as clean and hard, as if it had been swept; the fallow-lands, too, were brown, and there was something of a Spring-look in the turnip fields, where the sheep were feeding; when, lo, next morning the whole scene has undergone a change! Some mighty hand has been at work during the night, and every object is now covered white over with snow, which has fallen flake by flake, and hour by hour, from dark to daylight, until every way around, the landscape is covered, nearly knee-deep, with the feathery flakes. A fine, bright morning perchance follows, and the eye fairly

aches, while looking upon the glittering prospect which lies around. Hill, and wood, and field, and footpath, the long highway, and the broad, open common, are mantled over with snow, upon which the wagon moves along with scarce a sound, and the horse is beside you before you are aware of it; for every noise is deadened by the deep fall of snow. That is not a morning to sit moping over the fire, when so much amusement is to be found out of doors—when there are fortifications to erect, and houses to build, and snow-men to make, and a snow-ball to roll along, until it is as high as our own heads; and, above all, a good-natured snow-balling match to take place between two parties of boys, on the open common, where we are sure neither to injure ourselves, nor do any one harm. That is a morning to tie a thick comforter round the neck, lace the boots tightly, and put on the stoutest pair of worsted gloves, and sally out in the keen, cold, bracing air, knee-deep among the clean, white, untrodden snow; for the sky is blue overhead, and the sun shines bright, and he only, who cares not to come home with a pair of rosy cheeks, will sit and keep company with the cat by the fireside.

And now we will fancy ourselves out in the cold, healthy air, making a snow man. But first we must hold a brief consultation as to whether he shall have legs or not. A dozen pairs of hands are at work in a moment, for it is decided that he shall have a solid foundation to stand upon, and the best way will be to commence rolling a ball from the opposite side of the field, to the spot where we intend him to stand; and if we can but make it long, like a large thick garden-roller, his body will be formed at once, and to do this we must fasten a dozen or two of snow-balls together, until they are a yard in length or more, and when this is done, we have only to commence rolling away. Over and over, heavier and heavier it becomes, until, at last, from its very weight, it licks up the snow, clean down to the very grass, leaving as clear a track behind as if the space had

been swept by a broom. Onward we go, it requires all our united strength to move it, for it is now massy, and round, and heavy, as the lower portion of a large column. Then comes the great Herculean task, how shall we rear it on end? All hands are at work in an instant, we have succeeded in getting a rail under it—we lift, we pull, we purchase—we get it half-way up, and to our great disappointment it comes in two. Never mind, there is half of it securely fixed, our



other portion to it, and now we begin to form his shoulders, his neck, his head, his arms; we have got a short pipe to stick in his mouth; and we have got two pieces of coal for his eyes. And now we have built him up, we will stand at

a distance and pelt him with snow-balls, and see who can first hit the pipe in his mouth, or knock off one of his arms : and famous exercise shall we find it, for not one out of our whole number will feel cold. Then if we succeed in knocking his head off, we will, at night, bring the largest turnip we can purchase, hollow it out in the middle, and shape through the rind, the eyes, nose, and mouth, and in this we will put a lighted candle, and placing it on the neck of our snow-man, leave it in the centre of the field, with its fiery eyes glaring, and flaming mouth open, to startle some village dame, as she returns to her cottage after dark ; and pausing, half afraid, she will exclaim, "Laws-a-mercy ! what ever is it ?" until approaching nearer, she will say, "Odd bon ! those boys, they have been making a snow-man again, to frighten me." Oh, what grand castles have we erected ere now, out of the snow ! We used to go to the lath-renders, and get him to supply us with thin pieces of deal, which we reared up, and placed cross-wise, and piled the snow upon, making windows, and doors, and massy walls, and tall turrets, worked into battlements, and a huge snow-tower, that stood high and white over all ; and around it we scooped away the snow for the moat, and with the laths we built a bridge across ; we placed snow-wardens on the battlements ; we stationed snow-sentinels beside the bridge ; and when we had completed it, we retreated to a measured distance, and then commenced storming the castle with snow-balls, when we struck down tower, and turret, and keep, and battlement, and laid the wardens and sentinels prostrate, nor ceased until we left our castle a heap of snowy ruins.

Sometimes when the ponds and streams were frozen over, and covered with snow, we would cross them on a bough, like the man we here give in the engraving from Bewick, so that if we chanced to stumble upon a spot which the snow had covered, and where the ice would not bear us, we were pretty

sure of not sinking in deeper than the legs, for the strong bough which we bestrode in the middle, would be certain to rest upon the ice, both before and behind us, and mounted on such

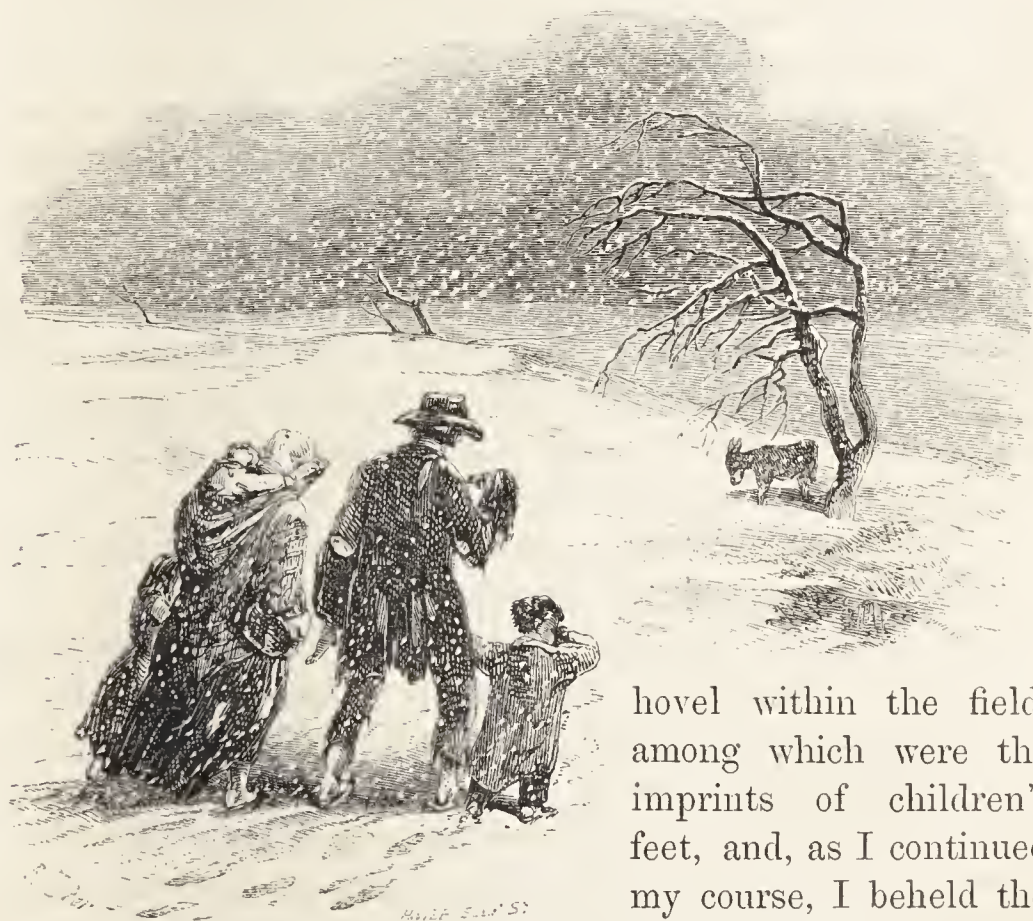


A WOODEN HORSE

as this, there was but little fear of our ever being drowned. Now and then we got into a hole, but what of that! we had only to run home, and get dry again as soon as possible; there was but little harm done, and depend upon it our friends were much better pleased than if we had got ducked up to the chin.

But I will now paint you another picture of Winter, such as I once saw while crossing Bulwell Forest. It was still early in the morning, and the snow, which had come down all night long, had not yet ceased to fall; but still came downward, in many a whirling eddy, and here and there it had gathered in many a deep drift,—forming long, ridgy, embankments of snow, which every hour was piled higher, by the cutting breath of the bleak north wind. Over the long, white, weary forest there was neither the dint of hoof, nor the print of wheel, nor the mark of a human footstep, saving my own; nor could I see halfway across the solitude, for between the eye and the edge of the low, leaden-coloured sky seemed drawn an ever-waving curtain of snow. As the wind howled through the bare oaks, and

the naked hawthorns, some mass of snow was dislodged, and either fell with a dead sound upon the earth, or was driven away to mingle with the large white flakes which still continued to fall. The fieldfares, for all their thick covering of feathers, were cold, and sat huddled together, among the leafless branches. Even the hardy donkey, as if in very despair, had thrust himself as far as he could among the entangling brambles, and ever and anon he gave his fallen ears a sharp jerk, to shake off the snow, as he cast a forlorn look upon the ground. At every bound the poor hare went head over ears, and in spite of my shrill whistle was compelled, occasionally, to halt, for every leap but left it at the foot of another barrier of snow. After walking some distance, I came to where a gate stood partly open, and saw the marks of footsteps from the thatched



hovel within the field, among which were the imprints of children's feet, and, as I continued my course, I beheld the

GROUP OF POOR TRAVELLERS,

who had passed that cold winter night, in the doorless outhouse in the fields : it consisted of a man, and woman, and four children, who, with heads bent down, were threading their uncertain way over the forest, while the wind and snow beat full and cold, in their pale, thin, and hunger-bitten faces. The poor man told me a long tale of his miseries, of how he had hoped to reach Nottingham overnight, and how the darkness overtook him, and he lost his way amid the snow, and after wandering about for a full hour without discovering any house, they at length found their way to the hovel within the field, and thanked God for guiding them to such a place of shelter. "True," he said, "the children had cried at first, but, in spite of hunger, they soon fell asleep; and, with the few armfuls of hay he had gathered from a neighbouring rick, he had covered them well up; nor did they again awaken until the cold, chill, and cheerless daylight dawned. Even money," he said, "would have been useless on such a night, and in such a spot, where they had lost their way." I conducted them to a public house in the nearest village; and once before the great, comfortable kitchen-fire, the thoughts of their sufferings soon seemed to melt away, in the enjoyment of a good hot breakfast. A glass or two of ale won the favour of the village carrier, whom I knew, and without a farthing charge for their fare, he good-naturedly put them all into his large tilted cart, and conveyed them to Nottingham.

I could tell you many a story of travellers who have lost their way in snow-storms, who have tumbled into pits and hollow places, where the snow had drifted, and lay many feet deep, and which they had mistaken for a continuation of the road they were traversing, and where they have perished, and their bodies were never found until the snow had melted away; of flocks of sheep that have been buried beneath the snow; of shepherds who have perished when they went out in search of their flocks; for many such accidents as these

occur in the deep ravines which open in the mountainous districts of Scotland; and even in our own country many have lost their way in wide wastes, and dreary moorlands, where no path was visible, and the night had overtaken them amid those untrodden solitudes of snow. Few, be it remembered, would perish, if they could but continue to proceed along their way, unless they chanced to stumble into some hidden hollow; but the cold produces a strange overpowering feeling of drowsiness, which it is very difficult to overcome, and many, I doubt not, who have yielded to this feeling, have laid down to sleep, and never awoke again, whose lives might have been saved, if they could but have mustered resolution enough to have walked along, till they reached some human habitation. Many a stage-coach has ere now stuck fast in the snow, and the passengers have been compelled to find their way back again, as well as they could, to the inn from which they last started; and letters, which the mail carried, had to be forwarded by men on foot, or horseback, over cross-country roads, where the snow did not lay so deep; and the passengers have been obliged to eat whatever the road-side house produced, in which they were forced to shelter, until a path was cut through the drifts, and they could conclude their journey; for some have slept in the hayloft, and others on the benches, or in chairs by the fire, thankful that they had a roof at all over their heads, instead of wintering it out all night in the open air. Far off in the fields you see some little cottage, or lonely farmhouse, standing amid the snow, looking from the distance as if half buried amid the white flakes; and you picture to yourself the plunging and struggling Gaffer or Gammer must have, ere they can get across those deep, white, untrodden fields, to procure the necessary articles they may require from the neighbouring village. Nor is it less amusing to watch the sheep in some turnip field, thickly covered with snow, how they will persevere and push themselves through with their ragged fleeces, finding

their way to a turnip here, and a top there, and just making a hole in the drift, which is piled over it, large enough for their heads while they feed,—not looking unlike a little arch, which a boy might have scooped out with his hand.

There is something very solemn in the appearance of a country covered with snow on a cloudy day, especially if you look over some point of it that is uninhabited; for there are none of those sounds and rural objects, heard or seen, which float and move about the same spot in summer. What birds there are, are silent, and hidden somewhere in the hedges; the cattle, which gave such a charm to the scenery, are driven from the fields. You miss the figures that dotted the landscape as they followed their out-of-door employments; neither a whistle nor a shout go ringing through the wood. The voices of children are no longer heard in the shelter of lanes, and the report of a gun, echoing afar off, only seems to make the silence more solitary, after the sound has died away. Nor is it less interesting to watch the snow falling upon the face of a river; to see flake after flake settle down, float along for a brief moment, and then dissolve for ever! or to watch the large fleeces, ere they descend in seeming lines, cross one another; or sometimes watch two flakes come in contact, cling together, and then fall softly upon the ground: or to observe some countryman, in his heavy, nailed boots, often pause to shake off the hard masses of snow, which have clung to his feet, and to see the lumps lying on the highway, bearing the print of every nail of the soles to which they have adhered; while some old man, with his shoulders up, bent nearly double with the cold, gives his ears a sharp pat occasionally to beat off the snow, and then laying hold of his poor red nose with his hands to keep it warm, wonders to himself what pleasure boys can find in being out in such weather.

Hogg, in his "Shepherd's Calendar," makes mention of a

snow-storm, which drifted to such a depth in the mountain-passes, as almost to reach to the tops of the trees; that the snow fell for thirteen days and nights without once ceasing, and hundreds of sheep sunk into a sleepy and torpid state, from which not one of them ever awoke again alive; and that so many died through the cold, that they made walls of the dead bodies of the sheep, which they piled one upon the other, to screen those that remained alive from the cold: that on one farm alone, out of nine hundred sheep only one was left alive; while whole flocks were at times buried beneath the snow, and nobody could tell where they had been lost, until the snow melted away, and they were found dead, which they often were, with their heads all turned one way. Numbers, he says, were swept away by the floods which followed; and in one place, where the tide threw out what was carried down by the river, there were discovered nearly two thousand sheep, and a hundred and eighty hares, all of which had been destroyed by the snow-storm. At one spot he came to, only the heads of a few sheep appeared, here and there, through the snow; the rest were covered deep over-head, in the very place where they were lying when the storm came on. They went about, he tells us, boring through the snow with their long poles, and scarcely finding a single sheep in a quarter of an hour, until at length a shepherd dog seemed clearly to understand what they were searching for; and running about upon the snow, he began scratching and looking at the shepherds, as if to draw their attention; and in every spot which he thus pointed out, they found a sheep beneath; and by this means two hundred were saved, which probably would never have been discovered, but for the shepherd dog.

But I should fill pages were I to tell you all I have seen and read about snow-storms, and sheep, and shepherds, and the sagacity of dogs; from those which are kept by the monks of Great St. Bernard, and that rescue travellers from the

snow in the mountains, to such as have followed their poor masters, and shared their hard fare, and remained faithful to the end, through all their misfortunes. As for sheep, I have nothing more to tell you about them, for we read in the Bible that flocks of sheep were kept by the early Patriarchs, and many a beautiful allusion is made to them in Scripture. Sheep originally are supposed to have descended from an animal called the Musmon, whose skin, beside being covered with long hair, bears also a short coat of wool, which is hidden under the longer covering, and that by domestication the short wool has been brought uppermost; and that in former days they were as regularly milked as the cows are now; and that some of those which run wild upon the Welsh mountains, will leap from crag to crag with a fearlessness that is scarcely surpassed by the strong and active goat.

Market-day, after a heavy fall of snow, is full of adventures. The carrier, with his cart and market-passengers, sets out from some village, which is situate on the hills. "The roads are rather heavy," says he, "but with a little patience we shall manage." He carries his usual load of packages, with all kinds of addresses, hampers containing butter and eggs, and choice poultry, pork sausages, and every variety of country produce; all of which he promises to deliver as faithfully as if the suppliers accompanied him themselves. But it is so cold, and as the snow is out, and they have nothing particular to go to town for, they therefore send a list of orders of what they want, sometimes verbally, sometimes written out, and then leave the rest to chance, and the old carrier. Two or three village-wives, have urgent business to transact at the distant market-town, and they must go, whether or no. Besides, the old carrier has traversed the same roads for forty years, and he ought to know whether they are passable or not, if he doesn't know, who does? And so, after much preparation, and a very early breakfast, they cover themselves well up in old

coats and cloaks, and clamber into the tilted cart.—“Deary me, how unfortunate we are!” both the old and young passengers exclaim; for, before they have travelled over two or three miles of ground, it begins to snow again; and they begin to think of the comfortable cottage fire they left, and the kettle singing cheerily on the hob, and to wish that they were safe home again. “There won’t be much,” answers the carrier, as he jumps out, and walks beside his horses, while the poor things find the snow deeper, and the load heavier, every few yards they proceed. Onward they go, down the road, which slopes gradually from the foot of the hills, until they reach the edge of the long, level plain, or valley, over which there is a slight descent for miles. “Bless me!” says one of the old women, if we go on at this snail’s pace, we shall never get there to-day.”—“Gee-whoop,” cries the carrier, using his long whip,—the poor horses strain every nerve, and steam again with perspiration, and pull and drag, until they once more stick fast in the snow, which now nearly reaches up to the axle of the wheel. The carrier pats them, and feels sorry that he has used the lash; he speaks kindly to them, and the horses prick up their ears as if to say, “Well, well, we forgive you, for we know the old women grumble so, that it would ruffle the temper of a saint to hear them. But don’t lose your good-nature, and be angry with us, we will do all we can.” They start once more, and pull with all their might and main, until crack goes something behind. “Stop, stop,” holla two or three voices from the inside; but there is no occasion to call stop, for the horses are again fast in the snow. “My hamper’s fallen out,” shouts some old wife, “and there’s all my sweet butter tumbling into the snow!”—“And all my live fowls have escaped!” exclaims another.—“And my basket of pork-sausages has fallen off!” cries a third: “and I declare if there isn’t that brute of a dog eating up my sweet pork-



pies and choice sparerib!" And out they jump, one after the other, to recover their property. This done, they all fall to at once, and abuse the old man, as if he could help his

CART STICKING FAST IN THE SNOW.

He declares, and truly, that he was not aware it had fallen to such a depth. "I don't believe you," exclaims one old woman, her temper heating, while she stands shivering in the cold. "You agreed to take us to Market-Raisen, and if you don't, I'll summons you before his worship, that I will, next justice-day."—"He knew he could never get so far,"

shrieks out the second, in a shrill voice, which rings through the poor fellow's ears worse than the wind. "He only brought us to get his fare; but if ever I pay him a farthing, my name's not Nanny Newsome."—"Whatever I'm to do for my week's tea, I do n't know!" says the third. "I can never drink that nasty stuff, which Tommy Brown sells."—"And my lad must have his boots," begins the first again.—"And my lass have some cough-drops for her cold," chimes in the second.—"And our William some oils for his rheumatics," is the third chorus.—"I'll never ride with you again," says number one.—"Nor I either," adds number two. "And I'll get everybody I know to send their things by the new carrier, that I will," shrieks the shrill-voiced old woman. And the poor carrier, to preserve the drums of his ears from being split by their din and clamour, is compelled to continue cracking his whip, and crying, "Gee-whoop!" to drown the sound of their voices. But all their abuse moves them not a foot further; and the carrier, well-knowing that his tongue is no equal match for three old women and two young ones, persuades them to get in again; promising them, that if he can once reach farmer Fillingham's, he will lend him a couple of horses, and then he knows he can drag through, heavy as it is. After many a halt, and many a struggle, he reaches the farmhouse; and the warm-hearted farmer, who knows every passenger as well as he does his own horses, comes out, accompanied by his hale and hearty wife, and they invite all the women in to warm themselves, and the honest dame heats them a little elder-wine of her own making; and as the old women sit and sip it, while the horses are getting ready, they regain their even tempers, and believe that they were a little bit too hasty after all. Something hot is also given to the honest carrier, and with the addition of the two strong horses he has borrowed, and the help of the farmer's man, who is to accompany him all the way, why they manage better than ever, and the old women

are every now and then comforted with the assurance that they have already got through the worst of it, and that the last two miles will be quite easy, compared to what they have gone through.

Lonesome and dreary are many of the places which the old carrier has to pass in the Winter,—the lengthy road between the dark plantations, which were infested with robbers, a score years ago; and the weary moorland, with its solitary sheet of water, which looks as black as ink, when the surrounding scenery is covered over with snow; and the great frozen reeds and rushes stand up stiffly, with their sharp edges; the water-flags looking as if they would cut through you; and the bushes that bend over the pools have a cold, white, forbidding look, making you feel that if you were to fall into the water, you would hardly like to lay hold of their chilly-frozen, snow-covered sprays, to pull yourself out again, so freezingly cold do they appear. And the old man feels all this, when he is returning home by himself, on a winter-night; and has been heard to remark, that both the plantation and the edge of the moorland, would be nasty places for a man to take up his night's lodging in, when the snow lies deep upon the ground. And on dark nights he hangs his lantern at the front of his cart; and if the sky is clear, and the air free from fog, and you should happen to be standing upon some distant eminence, you can see the light, which moves, so slow, that for a long time you fancy it is stationary; and when satisfied that it does move, and are aware what light it is, you then begin to wonder at what hour of the night he will reach home. And some, times the valley we have described as being covered with snow, is flooded, and unless the waters should be out to what he terms, "hedge-height depth," he still continues his journeys on the market-days, for every hedge, and tree, and post, are to him true landmarks; and so accustomed is he to the road, that he seldom swerves a yard from it; for, when there are no

objects on either hand to guide him, he keeps his eye steady, fastly fixed on some well-known point in the distance, and can tell by the depth his horses are in the water, whether or not they are keeping about the middle of the highway. When he has had an extra pint of ale, he will sometimes make a boast in the village alehouse that he could find his way to Market-Raisen blindfolded; and there is little doubt but what he could: as for his horses, they have gone on miles by themselves, many a time, while he was asleep in his cart; but then, as he said, "they never went any other way in their lives." A knowing old man is the Village Carrier.

Though it happened many years ago, that old carrier will never forget the dreadful Snow-storm, which in one night covered the valley to a frightful depth, and was driven by the wind against the long line of hills, where it gathered drift upon drift, in many an up-piled range, until it looked as if a new upland had arisen, long, high, and deep, the gathering together of many a wind-whirled wreath of snow. It was the last Saturday night before Christmas-day, when he was returning home on his journey from the distant market-town; and as he quitted the last few houses, and exchanged a "good-night" with such of the inhabitants as he knew, many looked up to the sky, and remarked that there would be a heavy fall of snow before morning, for not a star was visible in the sky, nor could you tell where the moon was, although it was at the full. He had with him in the cart a young girl, about fourteen years of age, who was going home to spend the Christmas with her widowed mother. She knew when she reached the carrier's house her little brother would be there to meet her; and she thought how easily they would carry the light box between them, and how soon they should walk over the two miles of ground which would bring them to her mother's cottage, which stood at the bottom of the steep, hilly lane. The boy was at the carrier's house long before she arrived, and many a wistful

glance did he cast at the door, as it was opened and shut, every now and then, by the woman, who began to feel uneasy about her husband, as it was past the time at which he usually arrived. She had several times remarked, "Oh, what a night!" as she resumed her seat beside the fire, facing the boy: he made no answer, but sat watching the snow-flakes which had been drifted in by the eddying wind, as they melted one by one, upon the warm and cheerful hearth. "You will never be able to walk home to-night," said the carrier's wife, "you will both have to stay here until morning; we can manage to make shift somehow." The boy looked at her a few moments in silence, then said, "Not go home to-night! Mother told me she should sit up for us, if it was ever so late before we came." Just then a loud gust of wind struck the side of the house, as if it would level it to the ground, and blew the door wide open; and in a few moments, the whole of the floor was white over with snow. The boy rose from his seat to latch the door more securely; and ere he sat down, said, "I should like to go and meet them, if you thought it wouldn't be far: Etty has never been home but once since Whitsuntide, and that was only one day at the feast." But the woman dissuaded him from going, and told him that Etty would be warm enough amidst the straw at the bottom of the tilted cart. This seemed to pacify the boy a little, and he ate a mouthful or two of the bread and cheese which she had cut him, then laid the rest upon the table. At another time he would have finished it all in about five minutes, but now he was uneasy, through thinking about his sister and his mother. Meantime the carrier had reached the high hilly road, which led in a direct line to his own door. He had persuaded his youthful passenger to get out, and walk beside him, without telling her why he did so; but such was the force of the wind that he expected every moment his cart would be blown over, and then he thought that some of the heavy boxes or hampers, might fall upon her, and injure her; so he held the

horse, and led it with one hand, while with the other he took hold of the little girl, and thus they measured their slow steps through the keen, cutting wind, and the heavy falling snow. The candle had long stood at the little end-window of the house ; and, as the carrier's eye first caught it in the distance, he said, " See, there it is !" for, as it threw out its rays upon the night, it seemed like a bright burning star amid the din and desolation of that wintry landscape. The careful housewife had placed a pair of shoes, and a coat before the fire, and the kettle had so long sung to itself upon the hob, that the boy wondered a dozen times to himself whether or not it would give over. None but an ear accustomed to the lightest change of sound would have heard the noise of those muffled wheels, as they came along slowly, and heavily, through the snow ; and when she jumped up, and rushed to the door exclaiming, " Here they come !" the boy also rose up, and, listening with his head aside, said, " I don't hear 'em ;" but when he got to the door, he could see a dark mass of something moving towards him, through the drifted snow. The little girl was first carefully attended to, and seated in the warmest place beside the fire, and then the carrier's wife helped her husband to bring in the boxes and parcels, which were placed upon the floor ; the storm rushing in with such force all the time, that it made the bright toasting-forks, and ladles, and bridles, and bits, and stirrups, which hung up against the opposite wall, jingle one against the other. A few words had passed between the carrier and his wife outside the door, and he came in, as if to warm his hands, while his real intention was to persuade the children to remain all night ; but the girl's answer was so earnest, and so full of feeling, when she said that she knew how unhappy her mother would be, and as for herself, she should not be able to sleep a moment, that it became painful to press her further, for she had a hundred reasons for going, and not one for remaining behind. The hardy boy also mustered up courage to speak, and said, that they

were not made of salt, and so could not melt away ; and as for the road, that was easy to find, and the box would shovel away the snow, as they carried it between them. “ Well,” said the carrier, shrugging up his shoulders, “ I will not compel you to stay ; and, since you are so bent upon going, I will take you to the end of Foss-Dyke lane, before I unharness my horses, it will save you a mile.” They both kindly entreated of him not to do so, he would have to come back by himself, they said, and they should soon be there ; but on this point he was resolute, and buttoning up his coat again, which he had unloosened for a few moments, he went outside, wiped the snow from off the horses, put the children with the little box inside the cart, saying to his wife as he departed, “ I shall not be long,” and again resumed his journey. The high range of hills along which he now passed was called the Cliff, or Scar ; if you stood on the steep acclivity on a clear day, and looked down into the valley, you saw ledge below ledge, which told you how the ocean, ages ago, had ebbed, and then remained stationary, then rolled away again, and again stood still, until it once more emptied its waters somewhere out at the mouth of that vast valley, then paused, until a new table-land was formed ; for so was the whole slope, from the summit of the cliff left, in wavy ridges, and steep level embankments, for miles and miles along ; and now over all these the snow had drifted from that wide unsheltered valley, and still kept gathering in vast heaps everywhere, saving upon the road where our travellers journeyed ; for from the highway it was blown onward, to the foot of other, and more distant hills.

At the end of the lane, the carrier left his passengers, bidding them be sure to take care, and keep on in a direct course ; for he knew that they were scarcely a mile from their mother’s cottage : and after he had gone, with the snow beating in their faces, the children went cheerfully along their way, carrying the little box between them. As the wind blew direct from the village

to which they were journeying, they heard the church clock strike eleven, and the boy said, "In another half-hour we shall see mother." The road was all down hill, and as the snow added much to the lightness of the night, they found no other difficulty than in its depth, for the first quarter of a mile, so went on keeping the centre of the road. As they proceeded further, to where the hilly way dipped down more abruptly, they remarked to each other, that the hedges on either hand were more than half hidden, and they went onward and onward until the snow covered them midway, and they found that, light as the box was, holding it up so high, made it very heavy; and when the tops of the hedges were no longer visible, and they could only see the dark outline of some tree, whose stem was already buried, it was then that they paused, and looked at one another—and heaving a deep sigh, Etty said, "We shall never get home to night!" The boy stood upon the box, and looking over the scene, said, "I can see the three elms that hang over mother's cottage, but Farmer Ingram's five-barred gate, which I know we are close upon, is covered with snow, and that is just as high as my head, for I measured myself there last summer, when I was tenting the corn—dear Etty, what will mother do for us!" But Etty was seated upon the box, with her face buried in her hands, sobbing aloud; the boy sat beside his sister, and taking hold of her hand said, "Don't cry so, Etty, let us say our prayers—you know mother told us, that God could do every thing." Etty said she would not cry, and rising up, placed her hand upon his shoulder, and mounting upon the box, exclaimed—"I can see lights moving about where the elm-trees stand; oh! God! perhaps poor mother has set out to meet us, and is lost, and they are seeking for her in the snow." And as she spoke, the picture rose so vividly before her youthful imagination, as in fancy she saw her dear widowed mother dragged out from under the deep snow-drift, pale, and cold, and stiff, and dead, that she unconsciously uttered a loud

shriek, and fell as if lifeless among the high piled drift. The brave little brother forgot all about his own safety, while he tried to restore his sister, and as he knelt over her, and took off his cap to make a pillow for her head, while the tears followed each other in rapid succession down his hardy cheeks, his heart sunk within him; for although he called "Etty! Etty!" in every endearing and plaintive tone, she made no answer; and when he kissed her he found her lips cold as death; and as he raised her arm for a moment, it again dropped by her side, motionless, resting just where it fell. His first act was to jump up, and plunge headlong into the snow in the direction of home, to fetch his mother. But a few yards before him the road went down sheer and deep; it was the steepest part of that hilly lane; and after struggling overhead in the snow for a minute or two, he found his way back to his unconscious sister, and sitting down beside her, wrung his hands and wept aloud. But even in that bleak and bitter night, God's good angels were abroad, and walking the earth; and it might be that the prayers of those children had drawn to the spot one of the invisible messengers; for, if prayer can reach up to the gates of heaven, who can tell how many "ministering spirits" are ever waiting there to do the Almighty's bidding? And, perhaps, one of these stood in the highway, unseen by the carrier, and prevented his horses from moving further, even as an angel stopped the ass on which Balaam rode. For thrice did the horses halt within a brief space of time; and as the carrier's heart had for some time smote him, for leaving the children at the end of the lane to find their way home by themselves, he resolved to turn back; he did so, and the horses seemed again to move along cheerfully. "Something told me," said the old carrier after, "that the children were in danger; and the instant the horses went so freely along of their own accord, I knew it was so; and from the moment I started to go back, my heart felt

lighter, and I seemed to breathe more freely—as for the snow and wind, I scarcely felt either.”

The drift was settling fast down, and covering over the two children; for deep, heart-breaking sorrow had so benumbed every other feeling in the poor boy, that, as he sat holding the cold, lifeless hand of his sister within his own, he felt not the snow gathering over him—felt not the big white flakes as they settled down upon his naked head, melting, at first, one by one, until a few remained, and others came faster and faster—he saw them not,—he felt them not,—as he bent over the form of his dear sister; even his sobbing became less audible, and a dull, drowsy feeling was unconsciously creeping over him—that cold sleep which many a benighted traveller has sunk under, never more to wake again until the last trumpet sounds, and the grave gives up its hidden families of the dead. A few more of those low, unconscious sobs, and all would have been over; the snow would have been “their winding-sheet”—when, hark! there came a sound as if driven back through the wind—it approached nearer; he heard the creaking of wheels; then the jingling of harness—that sound had saved them both from death; he sprang up, as it were, unaware; he raised his sister in his arms, he parted the long hair from her face, he strained his eyes, and looked forward; in a moment he was all eyes, all ears; then the wind came with another long, deep howl; it passed on, and the same sounds were heard again; he caught the “gee-whoop” of the carrier—he could not be far off, there were not many yards between them; he shouted, and received an answer; both cart and horses were fast, and he heard the heavy plod, plod, of the carrier, as he came along by himself, for his cart and horses could make no further progress along that deep, hilly, and snow-covered lane. The kind-hearted old carrier took the girl in his arms, as if she had but been a mere child, and placed her upon the straw

at the bottom of the cart; and whilst he was endeavouring to restore her, his wife came up, for she also had begun to feel uneasy, and said, that had she met her husband, she was determined to persuade him to turn back, and see whether the children had arrived in safety at home. They returned to the carrier's house, and Etty was soon in a warm, sound sleep, for she felt easier after she had knelt down and prayed for her mother. Nor had she been asleep more than an hour, when a loud knocking was heard at the door, for a man had come all the way round by the low road, which ran along the middle of the valley, and was five or six miles further than the nearest way, which was now impassable. All this way had that kind-hearted man come, that he might gather tidings of the safety of the children. For their mother had fainted away many times during that awful night; and although kind neighbours attended upon her, yet they could afford her no comfort; and it was not until this poor labourer volunteered to go, and see what had befallen them, that she could be at all pacified. The carrier got up, and persuaded him to take one of the best horses in his stable, and make all the speed he could back, by that long, round-about, low road, where the snow had not gathered in deep drifts, and to tell the fond mother that both her children were safe. But nothing could dissuade the brave boy from accompanying him; so he was at last allowed to ride behind, for he said, "When my mother sees me, she will know that Etty is safe, or I should never leave her." They reached home in about two hours in safety, and brought comfort to the sad heart of that fond and disconsolate mother. The little box was not found until after many days, when the snow had melted away; and there are those yet living who well remember that night. Etty heard the village bells ringing for church, as, accompanied by the honest carrier, she entered her home; what her feelings were when she remembered, how, from that church-tower she heard

the clock strike eleven on the previous night, I cannot tell you, but her eyes were filled with tears, as she raised her sweet face, and looked at the old carrier, while with her finger she pointed to the village church.

I before told you that many strange birds visit us in Winter, which we never meet with in our rambles at any other season of the year ; excepting it be a straggler or so, that has remained behind. While others, which stay with us all the year round, are frequently driven by the sharp frosts, and snow, to search for food, nearer the habitations of man. We see them about the barn-door, and in the stack-yard, perched upon the palings, and busy in the garden ; for they find both food and warmth near our abodes, when the fields, and the forests yield neither ; for then the little Titmouse pulls the straw from out the cottage eaves, to get at the insects which are concealed within. Even the Thrush and the Blackbird will enter into the farmyard in quest of food ; and the latter will frequently venture up to the very threshold, in quest of crumbs. But the Bunting is the most mischievous of all these Winter visitors, for a flock of them would soon unroof a stack, by drawing out the straws one by one, to get at the corn underneath. Wag-tails may also be seen about the ponds and water-courses, and the river-sides, in search of insects. These are the smallest birds that walk, lifting up first one leg, then the other ; for most little birds, as you must have noticed, hop along as if both their legs were tied fast together. You will wonder, when I tell you, that although so many birds leave us in the Winter, the smallest British bird that is known, remains with us the whole year ; and that is, the Golden-crested Wren. Throughout frost or snow, may this beautiful little thing be seen, hopping about the fir trees, or amongst the green leaves of the holly, or ivy. When full-grown the golden-crested wren, does not weigh more than eighty or ninety grains ; yet, in the breeding season, it has been watched, and for sixteen hours a day, has it made thirty-six

journeys every hour, and returned each time with food for its young ones. Oh ! that some idle boy may read this, take out his pencil, and reckon up how many hundreds of journeys this little bird made in sixteen hours to feed its young, the weight of food it must have carried in the course of the day, and how tired it must have been by night ! I think, after such an example of industry, set him by the smallest bird that is known in England, he will blush if he ever finds himself idling away his time again, when he has matters of business to attend to. But of all our winter favourites the Robin-red-breast stands chief ; for he is familiar to us all : and the little child, which can only just manage to walk, will toddle to the door to throw a few crumbs down for the robin. He is endeared to us by the ties of poetry, and we never recall the old ballad of the “ Babes in the Wood ” without picturing the robin-red-breast, that “ did cover them with leaves.” Sometimes he hops upon the window, leaving pretty marks of his little feet upon the snow, and peeping through the pane with his dark, bright eyes, asks us, as well as he can, for food : if a few shovel-fulls of earth are thrown up in the garden, there he is rummaging about to see what he can find ; and if the spade is left on end in the soil, he sometimes mounts upon the handle of it, and sings away, as if there was no such thing as Winter in the world. Nor is it in Autumn, or Winter, only, that the redbreast sings ; for I have frequently heard it in Summer, and seen it too, whilst it was singing. Neither does it fly, like an ingrate, from the abode of man, in the Summer season ; for only keep a sharp look out, and you will see him on the garden hedge, or upon the palings, many times during the Summer months of the year, for it is never far absent, unless when building its nest, or rearing its young. True, it is not so much in need of crumbs then as now, for in Summer it can find plenty of insects to feed upon ; though there are instances on record, of its having entered the cottage in Summer to pick up what it could find on the floor.

A pleasing sight is it to see a group of children standing against the door in Winter,



FEEDING THE ROBINS.

How delighted they appear, as step by step he comes hopping nearer, until, at last, he reaches the furthest crumbs; and then, finding that he has nothing to fear, becomes bolder at every hop, until he is within reach of the children's feet. Poor little fellow! his boldness, like that of many a brave man's, sometimes costs him his life, for he has before now pecked his way up to the very hearth of the cottage, never dreaming that the cruel cat was there, ready to eat him up at a mouthful. Then the sparrows! what boy has not heard their "chirp, chirp," upon the roof in a winter morning, sounding not unlike the sharp, short stroke of a knife-grinder, when he is putting the finish to his work;—dusky, dirty dogs are those sparrows! and get skulking under the smoky eaves until they are sometimes almost as black as a parcel of little sweeps. And oh! what fellows they are to fight! they do sometimes give one another such a licking, that we could almost fancy the young gentleman who has had the worst of it, must be glad to keep his bed under the tiles for a day or two at least. Then they are such thieves too! Bless you! they no more mind popping into

another's nest, whilst the owner is out, and lying down as comfortably as if it was their own, than they do about dropping off the eaves, to pick up a bit of bread ; and when the poor sparrow returns, who had built the nest, the thief who has taken possession, will thrust out his thick, hard, horny beak, and peck and snap at the rightful owner ; and if this does not drive him away, he turns out, and then they fight for it, and sometimes the robber comes off with the worst of it. Occasionally the sparrows will take possession of a rookery in winter, and ensconce themselves within the old nests, and a pretty squabbling do they kick up about it, as to which shall sleep in the best chamber ; or, as one has observed, about the rooks themselves, quarrelling at bedtime, about which should have the largest share of the blanket. Many an hour did we amuse ourselves in the winter by catching the sparrows in a trap made of four bricks, merely for the fun of letting them go again, and we have caught the same bird twice in one winter. Our plan was to rear two bricks up edgewise, but sufficiently apart to allow another brick placed flat, to fall in between them, with a fourth reared across on the edge, at the ends of the first two bricks ; we propped up the flat one which came in between with a bit of stick, to which a small piece of bread was fastened by a string. When the sparrow entered, and began to peck at the bread, down came the stick, and the elevated end of the brick which lay with the flat side downwards, fell upon the edge of the one which was placed crosswise, and there he was safe enough, without doing him any injury ; and after we had examined him, and sometimes ornamented his neck with a bit of red leather or ribbon, we gave him a chuck, and away he went ; and next morning, perhaps, he sat chirping upon the eaves amongst the rest of his brother sparrows, just as if nothing at all had happened to him. Once we ornamented one with a blue silk cap, which was stitched very neatly under his throat, but in a few weeks he had made it so dirty, that it became

the very colour of himself; and we verily believe that he died through being overfed, for he was in size a very Daniel Lambert amongst the sparrows, as his capped head never appeared but what we threw him out a handful of food: for four winters did he reside under the same roof, without once changing his lodging. Many a flock of



WILD GEESE

have I seen alight, in the fens and marshes of Lincolnshire, in Winter; and often have I heard them passing over the village in the night, when I could not see them; uttering, every now and then, their shrill, wild cry, high up in the air, as they sailed along in the darkness. What strange shapes have I seen a flock assume during their flight! Sometimes they took the shape of the letter V; then one side would open out, not unlike L, though still presenting a point foremost: and so would they ever continue, changing the form of the figure, and adapting it to the currents of air through which they had to cleave their way, just as it opposed, or favoured their course. Their flight was, also, generally far beyond the reach of gunshot. I knew an old wildgoose shooter, whose gun was near seven feet long, and have often heard him say that they were the most difficult birds to approach that he knew; and he would often lie down flat in his boat-bottom, and so go drop-

ping down the sluices, in the marshes, to get at them; for, if he once raised his head, so that it could be seen above the banks, they were up, and off in an instant; so he used to float silently along, trusting to the noise they made while feeding, to tell him when the exact moment had arrived to spring up, without so much as saying, "Are you ready, my gentlemen?" Sometimes they are reached by what is called a "stalking-horse," which is a blanket, or piece of canvas, stretched on a light frame, large enough to conceal a man behind; and, with this before him, the wildgoose-shooter will draw nearer and nearer to the flock; for if their eyes once become familiar with an object, without, in the first instance, creating an alarm, they will permit it to approach them without suspicion. But the



WILD SWAN

is the noblest bird of the whole aquatic species. Just fancy seeing half a score of these fine, noble fellows sailing about, in some solitary bend of the river, all as white as snow, weighing nearly

twenty pounds each, and sometimes five feet long, and, when their snowy wings are stretched out, measuring above seven feet across—that is something like a sight, I can tell you! Then, there is the comfort of thinking that, if you can but capture them, they will be your own; for nobody living can lay claim to them: they have no owner, nor no one can tell exactly from what country they came. And oh! what a wild, singing sound they make! you might almost fancy that it was a cuckoo flying over your head, did you not know that the cuckoo never winters with us, and that the bird whose call you hear is about sixty times larger, and that the sound is also louder. While feeding, this cry is not so loud; and there is then something very pleasing and musical in the sound. Beautiful do they look when asleep upon the water, borne gently along by the current; while the wind comes, as if in sport, at times, to ruffle their snow-white plumage, as if only to peep at the silvery down which is hidden beneath. Beautiful must it be to behold them,

“Floating double, swan and shadow,”

in the silent lochs, which spread out at the base of the majestic mountains of Scotland, where they sit upon the waters, sleeping like the Spirit of the Calm, who has folded her white wings, and come down to dream in that quiet loch, around which the solemn mountain shadows keep a silent watch. Fitting spot would that be, in the still midnight, to listen to the song of the dying swan, which, if aught like what poets have imagined it to be, is a music such as mortals are seldom permitted to hear, and which never yet sank into the heart of a misbelieving naturalist. And I am compelled to write my name amongst the number, who believe that the death-song of the wild swan had its origin in some beautiful fable, the hidden meaning of which has been lost for many a forgotten age.

I will now describe to you the method of capturing the



WILD DUCK,

which, when it is explained, I think you will allow to be, perhaps, the most singular of all the plans adopted to catch water-fowl at this season of the year. Near their favourite haunt a ditch is dug, about four yards across, at the entrance, and not more than two feet wide at the narrow end: this is circular, although, for the first few yards, it bends but little. The entrance about this ditch, or pipe, as it is called, is kept clear of reeds and rushes, so that the wild ducks may be enticed to settle about the banks to preen or peck themselves. On both sides of this ditch stakes are made fast in the ground, and brought together at the top; for strong willows will bend to any thing. As the ditch narrows, wooden hoops are stretched across, and each end stuck into the ground: over all these a net is thrown; and you can readily imagine that, when the ducks are once in the creek, and under this awning of network, they keep swimming further in until they get to the end. But, lest they should be in no hurry to enter, a dog is trained

up to drive them into the water ; and, when he has once succeeded in doing this, he keeps making his appearance, at different holes between the stakes, until he gets them up to the end of the ditch. Just picture to yourself the wild ducks, sitting quite comfortably, two or three dozen of them, perhaps, together, preening themselves, as it is called, and drying their feathers, when, suddenly, something stirs—it is the dog, and into the water they go. Some say that the dog's motions entice them in, and that, by making his appearance at different places under the net, their curiosity leads them forward to see what it is. Once, however, in, they are secure ; for the man, who is concealed at the entrance, has only to step forward, wave his hat, and frighten them in a little further, should they not be far enough, then give the mouth of the net a twist, and they are quite safe ; for he has no difficulty in taking them out, one by one, as he keeps narrowing and tightening the net. Tame ducks are also trained to lead the way into these nets, and are called “ decoy-ducks :” they are easily known by the man when he comes to take them out, and are treated much better than they deserve ; for they are spared to decoy others in again, whilst the poor innocent wild ducks, they led into the snare, are killed. I need not attempt to draw any moral from these decoy-ducks ; for every sensible boy will see the moral in a moment, and not a few, perhaps, will remember how innocently they have sometimes got into a scrape, while the the originator of the mischief escaped ; and how, at other times, by unthinkingly doing what we have seen others do, we unconsciously get ourselves into trouble, as I once did by following a schoolfellow into a garden, which, he said, was his uncle's, and that I might help myself to whatever I liked. I did, and was caught by the owner, who was no relation of the boy's, and who had the effrontery to assert that he never said the garden was his uncle's. I, however, had the good fortune to be believed, and escaped with a slight reprimand, whilst he was punished ; for

I did not, at the moment, think how wrong it was of me to take the fruit, even believing, as I did, that it was his uncle's, unless I had had that uncle's consent. That boy was a decoy-duck: he allured me under the net; and, fortunately, I escaped, whilst he was caught. But justice does not always hold her scales with so even a hand as she did on that occasion; for it too often happens that the greatest rogue gets off, and the innocent suffer, especially amongst boys. For a noble-minded lad, if he is guilty at all, will generally take to himself the largest share of the blame, and leave the meaner ones to get off with as many excuses as they can make. I remember a fine-spirited lad once enticing us into a boat, which the captain had left fastened to the side of the wharf whilst he went on shore. The captain returned long before we came back with the boat; and, when we rowed in sight, threatened that he would give us all a ducking the moment we landed. "You shall not suffer for me," said our companion, landing us at another wharf where he knew we should escape the ducking. He then rowed up to where the captain was still waiting, his anger increased all the more through having had to wait. "I took the boat, captain," said the boy, "and am the only one there is to blame. I would not have done so had I thought you would have wanted it." The captain was a noble-hearted sailor, and held out his hand, and forgave him in a moment. That boy was not a "decoy-duck."

It is amusing to watch the attitudes and expressive looks of cattle when they come to the pond to drink, for the first time, after it is frozen over. Deceived by the smooth glittering surface, they bend their necks as usual, when, instead of plunging their mouths into the soft, yielding water, they find a hard, cold substance, through which they cannot penetrate, and it is not until after they have made several attempts that they appear satisfied there is something wrong. One succeeds another, and, in spite of the lowing they make, each seems

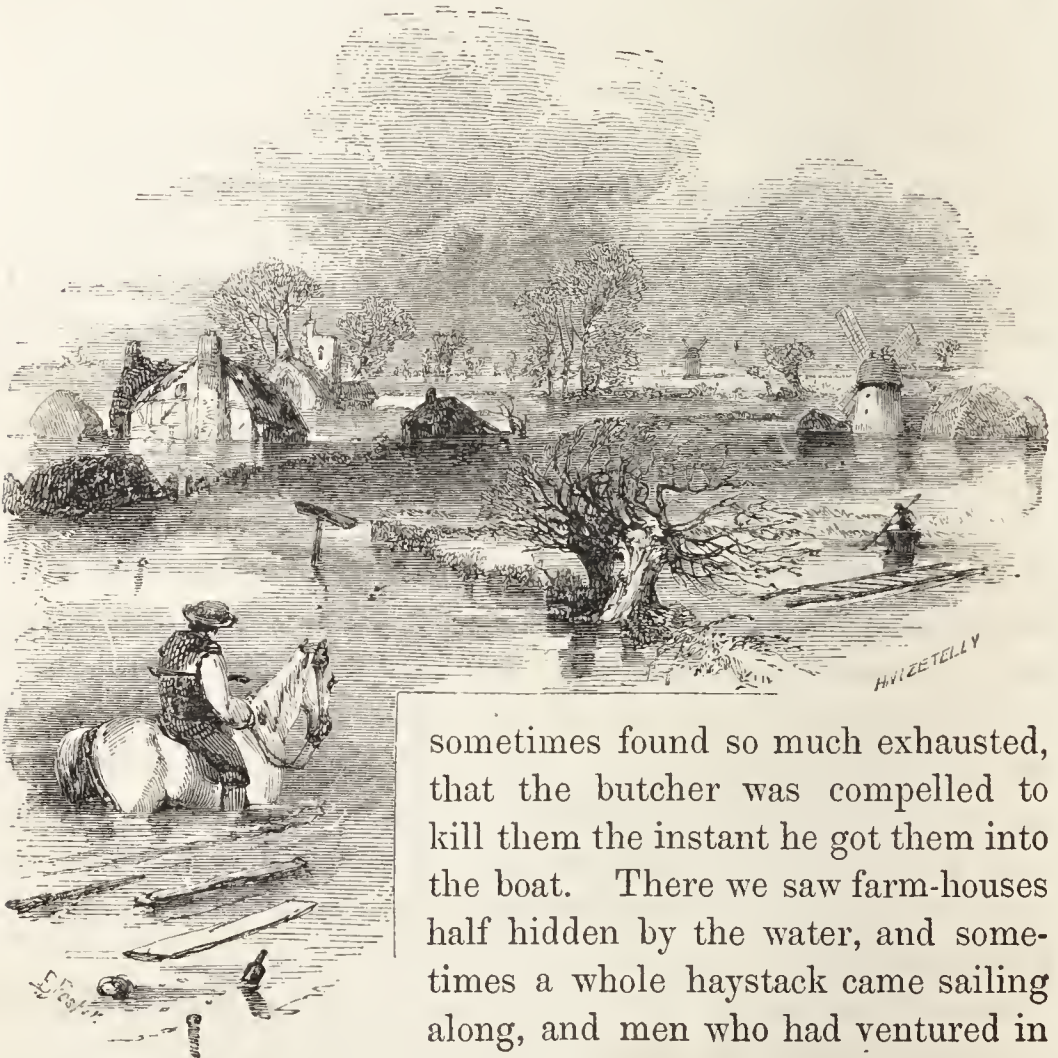
determined to judge for itself; nor will they, after they have returned disappointed, move far from the spot, but still continue lowing, and looking in the direction of the farm-yard, as if they expected assistance from that quarter. After the ice has been broken for them two or three times, they then gather about the pond in the morning, and patiently wait until the farmer-man approaches with his mallet to break through the frozen mass, before they quench their thirst. Should he find only one solid sheet of ice up to the edge, or shallow part, of the pond, he ventures very cautiously upon it, and, with a stout rail in his hand, begins to break away as far out as he can reach; for where it is deep, he is sure to find plenty of water beneath the ice. His weather-stained frock gives him quite a picturesque appearance, as he stands in the midst of the cattle, which are marked black, and white, and red; while around him floats their warm, fragrant breath, surrounding him everywhere, as if he stood in the steaming atmosphere of a brewery. Sometimes, during a winter's walk, a freezing shower comes rattling about our heads, causing the branches of the trees to look as if they were incased in glass, and hanging upon the slender and pointed sprays, like drooping diamonds; the ruby berries and emerald leaves of the holly look as if they were shut in a jewel-case of the purest crystal, and the tufted reeds and rushes glitter again, as if they were hung with pendants of silver. The withered grass is bowed down beneath these weighty gems; and the poor birds hop about with an ill grace, as if they did not at all like being encumbered with such a load of unnecessary ornaments. Even the ragged ass, on the common, finds his uncombed mane decorated with precious stones of the purest water, which he shakes off as speedily as he can, as if he knew that such useless ornaments would only make him appear more ridiculous in the eyes of his brother donkeys. But of all things which the frost selects to display its beautiful workmanship upon, nowhere does its exquisite

tracery show to such advantage as upon glass. What picturesque wintry landscapes have I seen on a frosted pane! Sometimes as of a wild, mountainous country, covered over with snow, with here and there a little cottage, half-buried beneath the heavy mass which had fallen into the valley below; or, high up, was the hunter indistinctly seen in the far distance, descending from the giddy heights. At times the scene was a vast solitary forest, amid the silence and desolation of which no living thing moved; not even a breath of wind seemed ever to have stirred a feathery snow-flake, and every way the eye caught glimpses of deep hollows, filled with snow, across which huge trees stretched, with their entangled roots, which were twisted into a thousand fantastic forms, and lay heavily upon the white underwood they had crushed in their fall. On another pane the frost had shaped itself into an English landscape; and far away over the snow-covered fields, which were diversified by many a long hedge, and many a lonely cottage, and thatched homestead, there seemed to rise the village spire in the distance, amid its clump of frozen trees, while a long line of white undulating hills, filled up the background of the picture; and all the foreground was covered with fan-like ferns and silver fir-trees, and such flowers as the eye never saw, saving in that fanciful and frosted garden. Sometimes a wide moorland seemed to spread out, where not a rude hut rose, neither was there any vestige of a human habitation, nor the outline of a lonely road, to tell that aught living had ever moved over that solitary scene; but, far as the eye could stretch, it seemed one unbounded and untrodden desert of snow. Many an hour did I amuse myself, when a boy, by tracing upon the frozen panes such scenes as these; and even in a bright fire, on a winter's night, has the imagination also been at work, tracing castle, and crag, and ragged precipices, and lofty mountains, whose deep gorges were lighted up with a blazing sunset of gold. Such trifles as these prove that the

mind of an imaginative boy need never for a moment want either an object for amusement or for meditation; for even the book that is read through and closed, to a fanciful boy, will still furnish new entertainment, for the inward eye will then endeavour to call up the very scenes he has been reading about—the characters will pass before him, one by one, while each stirring incident rises up with all its life-like action. If on sea, we picture the shipwrecked man, clinging to a spar, and tossed by the angry billow upon the beach. We see the tiger, from which he had so narrow an escape, retreat, bleeding and wounded, into the jungle. We hear the thunder of the deep avalanche tearing down the steep mountain-pass, which the traveller had but a few minutes before left; and we behold the oak under which he had sheltered when the tempest first commenced, driven into a thousand pieces by the dreaded thunderbolt. And as the mind thus pictures the incidents which link page to page in the volume, we seem somehow to become an actor in all these stirring and dangerous scenes. One boy will walk a mile or two through the country, and scarcely meet with a single object that arrests his attention, or furnishes him with matter on which to make a remark when he returns home; another, more observant, although he traverses scarcely a quarter of the same space of ground, will meet with a hundred things to interest and delight him. So would it be with the frost-work and the fire—one would only see a zigzag and unmeaning mass of white, which deadened the light, in the beautiful tracery upon the window-pane; and the fire would only interest him so far as he was either warm or cold, and according to his feelings, as it burnt either dull or bright: while the other would see in the same objects all we have attempted to describe.

But I have not yet told you about the great Winter flood, caused by the snow melting and the rains descending from the hilly countries, and the tide, or Heygre, which I before spoke

of, that came stronger, and made the river rise higher, until it broke through, and overflowed its banks, and covered the whole face of the country for miles and miles around; rushing through the great open streets of the towns, filling the cellars and bursting through the floors, and making such havoc as you never saw. Oh, what a rushing out there was in boats to save the cattle in the fields! What a pitiful bleating amongst the poor sheep as they swam to and fro, were carried away by the current, or driven onward, until their long fleeces got entangled in some hedge, the top of which was just visible above the waters, where they were



sometimes found so much exhausted, that the butcher was compelled to kill them the instant he got them into the boat. There we saw farm-houses half hidden by the water, and sometimes a whole haystack came sailing along, and men who had ventured in

up to the middle of the horse, hollaed to us to come nearer with the boat, for they dare not venture any farther; then we hoisted our sail, and the horsemen followed in the "wake" of the boat, as we pointed out where the highroad lay that was covered with water; and sometimes, when it was too deep, we took him in and placed him at the stern, where he held the bridle, while the horse swam heavily behind, until we arrived where the water was shallower, and he could no longer mistake his way, but saw far before him the dry ground, which went rising up to the very foot of the hills. Ah! that was something like a place to sail in, where we could go straight across without tacking, over the wide marshes and the fields, taking for our landmarks the towers of the village churches—Beckingham, and Burton, and Bole, and Sawaby, and Wheatly; and then straight across again through the broken openings in the river-bank, to Lea, and Naith, and Gate-Burton, and Torksey, with its old ruined castle; far as ever the eye could range over the water-covered valley of the Trent did we sail, from the foot of the eastern hills to where the western summits sloped opposite; over gates, and hedges, and stiles, that were buried beneath the flood, and across many a winding footpath and broad highroad, whose "whereabout" we could only now trace by the top of some familiar tree, or the long waving line of some high hedge, in which stoats, and weasels, and rats, and mice, and rabbits, and hares were hidden amongst the drifted hay and straw that had been carried thither by the overwhelming current. Then there were vessels which had got out of their course in the river, and had grounded upon some hidden bank, where they stuck fast: and there were farm-houses in the fields, to which we had to carry provisions in our boats; for the inhabitants were prisoners in their chambers, and all they had to look at was the wide waste of water which stretched out every way, and to watch the flood, as it rose inch by inch around the walls of their dwellings. Many a chase had we after the wild animals which

had taken shelter in the hedges. Many a stoat, weasel, and



F E R R E T

did we pursue from tree to tree, and give chase to many a rat who had now no hole in which to hide his head! Then at night the bells were rung in the village churches, and lights hoisted on the tall steeples, as guides to the boats that were out carrying the passengers to and fro; and voices were heard shouting amongst the hills, as they sought after the cattle which had strayed far away, for the whole country around was in a state of commotion; and ever, as we passed some little cottage, where the old woman and her husband were imprisoned by the waters, she would holla out to us to fetch something from the grocer's, telling us, with uplifted hands, that she had neither tea nor sugar, that her coals and potatoes were under water in the cellar below, and that the poor pig was squealing itself to death for want of food; and then we rowed close under the window, and standing upon the boat "thoft," looked in, where we saw the old man smoking his pipe, beside a little handful of fire, beheld the pig squealing in one corner of the chamber, and saw the cocks and

hens perched on the chair backs, the boxes, and the tables, while under the bed the ducks were quacking, for the flood had come upon them so suddenly in the night, that the old man had been compelled to take his whole stock of fowls and pigs within doors, to prevent their being drowned. Then after much persuasion, and not without difficulty, we got the old man out of the chamber window into the boat, and rowed him away to the nearest village at the foot of the hills, where he borrowed a little coal until the flood went down, succeeded in obtaining a few potatoes, and a little barley-meal for his pigs, and purchased what articles he was in need of, of the grocer: then, when we had once more landed him safely, with his stores, in his cottage chamber, he bade us to be sure and call upon him in the summer, when the fruit was ripe in his garden, where we should be welcome to whatever we chose. And many a time have I been out in such floods as these, and sailed for miles away with my companions, to the villages which I have named above; and one large flood I well remember, which covered the whole of the main street in the old town of Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, when boats were rowed up and down, in the streets between the houses, and the poor sailors picked up many a shilling through supplying the wants of the inhabitants; the ground floors of whose houses were three or four feet under water. The scene rises as vividly before me, as if it was but yesterday, when I took our dinner to the bakehouse in a boat. These, and many other wonders, which I have not space sufficient to write about, without intrenching upon more important matters, did I witness when a boy.

To the minds of boys generally a bleak, black frost brings but few ideas of misery. They think more of the sliding, and skating on the ponds and rivers which are frozen over, and the pleasure that it will afford, than the stagnation it produces in business, the check it is to all navigation, the number of hands it throws out of employment, especially in out-of-door occupations,

and even within doors, where its effects are also felt. It nips the fingers of the woodman until he can scarcely wield his axe; the ditcher cannot continue his labour, for the ground is almost as hard as iron; and the plough stands useless in the middle of the frozen field; it freezes the bricklayer's mortar, and throws out of employment the poor labourer who mixes it; the rope-maker cannot get his hemp to stretch properly; the chair-bottomer finds his wet rushes frozen together; the joiner's glue sets almost in no time; the cobbler's wax stands up in his pot, like a black island surrounded with ice. The glazier complains of the brittleness of his glass; the gardener that it nips up all the greens in his grounds; the turner that the oil has set upon the joints of his lathe; while the locksmith grins again as he handles the cold iron keys; and even the blacksmith is compelled to wield his heaviest hammer to keep himself warm: for every trade is affected more or less by a keen frost. Even the little tailor, who is almost stuck upon the fire-back, murmurs because his thread breaks so many times, which, he says, is all owing to the frosty weather. Children have chilblains on their little feet, and old grandmothers complain about their rheumatics; and should a boy break the jug in which he is bringing home either the milk or the ale, why, of course, it is all owing to the frost. Then, if a lad can but find an excuse for fetching a pail of water in, what a quantity he is sure to spill upon the smooth pavement (by accident)—yet, somehow, in the very spot where he has been wishing, all day, to make a long, nice slide: and he is up next morning by daylight, and sliding away long ere breakfast-time, until out comes some old man, who can still feel the bumps on his bones which he has had in his time on those “nasty slides;” and with a handful of salt, or a shovel-full of sand or ashes, accompanied by many a growl, he puts an end to all further sliding for that day. And the old man is quite in the right for doing so; for there are plenty of places, out of the way of all passengers,

to make slides on, and these are the spots which boys ought always to select.

I well remember the day when nearly all the rivers in England were frozen over; when, for weeks, not a ship could move, and water could only be obtained by breaking holes through the thick ice; when we could skate and slide for hours, without any feeling of danger, past many a marsh, and meadow, and wooded banks, which sloped down to the river's rim; when carts and horses went fearlessly across that frozen pathway, and large fires were kindled in the very centre of that deep river, upon bricks placed on the ice; when the baker skated to the nearest village with the bread-basket buckled upon his back, and the butcher-boy went sliding after him, with the joint he had to take home slung across his shoulder. Upon the ice the old gingerbread-woman spread out her stall; and there the publican broached his cask of strongest ale. Benches and chairs were planted round, in which old sailors sat smoking, telling of the wonderful things they had seen in the Polar Seas, where the white bears roared, and the huge black whales spouted up water as high as the roof of a house, and great mountains of ice came sailing along, whose summits seemed taller than the topmast of the whaling-vessel in which they then sailed. Then, coals had to be fetched from the distant pits in wagons, for there was no longer any water-conveyance; and poor, starved, hungry-looking men went about the streets, with a cabbage stuck upon the top of a pole, exclaiming, "Please to remember the frozen-out gardeners;" and strange-looking birds came flocking about the houses in search of food; for the earth was so frozen that they could not find an insect any where.

Oh! what skating there was in those days! Some could cut out their names upon the ice; others make all kinds of picturesque flourishes; and not a few, the moment their skates were fixed on, after much trouble, showed the ice their heels, and came down with a loud bump, which

caused all the bystanders to laugh again. These some good-natured skaters would occasionally take in tow, by bidding them lay hold of the end of their hook-stick, while they went foremost, and thus they were dragged along; and so, after a little practice, and a few more falls, they were enabled to take care of themselves, and, in a few hours, make a stroke or two much to their own satisfaction. Now and then a poor boy, who might be hired for a penny or so, would pull them on; for it required but little exertion to run faster than an unpractised hand could skate. But sliding was much the liveliest amusement after all. You never saw such slides as we were wont to have upon the river, when it was frozen over; for we cared but little about them unless they were at least twenty yards long. Then we had one up, and another down; and we were ever upon each other's heels: for if one boy halted a moment, another was sure to shout out, "Keep the pot a-boiling." For none but good sliders dare venture there, for fear of having their heels tripped up; for, if one boy fell, the next was sure to tumble over him; and so on, to the very last who chanced to be upon the slide at the time. And there we oft-times lay, laughing and rolling, a dozen or more down together; then we were up, and at it again in an instant, ever carrying the same merry faces, just as if nothing at all had happened. Oh! what a healthy hue it left upon our cheeks; how it set our youthful blood in circulation; and cold and biting as the frosty air was, we felt it not, for the exercise put us into a warm perspiration; and we contrived to have a good long run, to give us "head-way" before we went, with a rapid motion, down the long, smooth slide. And then, there were some boys who could go the whole length upon one leg; and others who glided along with both their feet together; some who slid with the left leg first, and others with the right; and many so clever, that they could turn themselves round, with their faces to those who followed; and we would lay hold

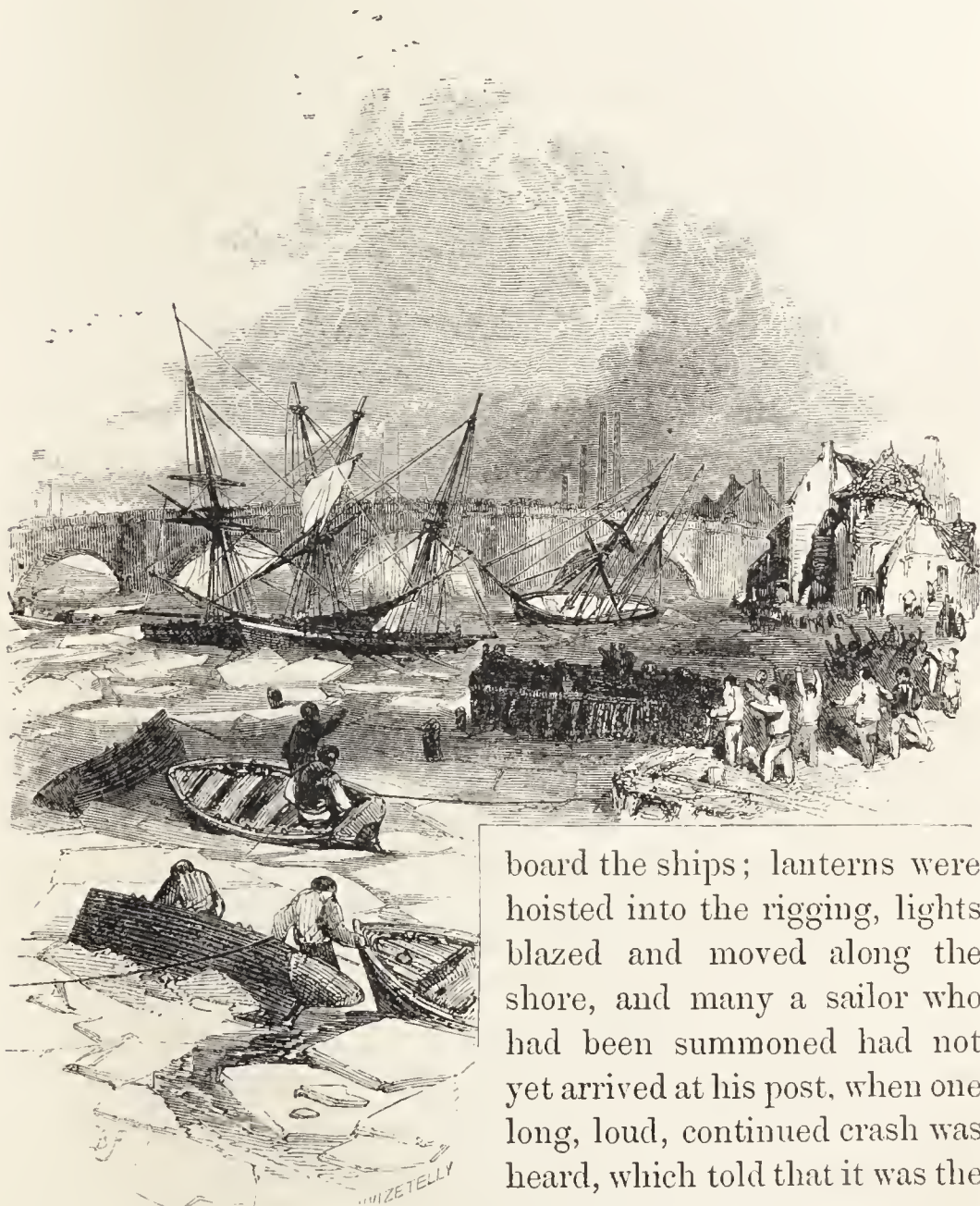
of one another, and shoot off when halfway down; and do a many more other things, which would set a town-bred boy a wondering. Then, while skating, we used to play at ball upon the ice, each of us carrying a hooked or knobbed stick; and, forming ourselves into two parties, a round wooden ball was thrown down upon the ice, midway between the two distant goals, or winning-places, which were, perhaps, a mile apart; and whichever party could first drive the ball to the end of the allotted distance won the game. Sometimes it so chanced that a rapid skater got the first stroke, and then he had it all his own way; for there was no approaching him until he reached the goal. But these distances could only be played on the long canals, or when the river was frozen over.

And now I will attempt to describe to you a grand and awful scene; and such a one as I dare say you never read about in any other book, nor did I ever behold such a scene but once, in the breaking up of the ice on the river. First there came a gentle thaw—then the tide, or Heygre, which I have before given you so long a description of, in “Summer,” begun its silent work beneath the ice, lifting it up gradually hour by hour, as the body of water continued to arise unperceived, until you were startled every now and then, by loud crackling sounds. In the still night you heard them, and during the calm intervals of the day; and then you saw the edge of a large sheet of ice, raised an inch or two above the mass, and ever the same cracking and banging went on, like the sound of so many gunshots in rapid succession, and so it continued, the water welling through in some places between the edges of the ice, though, with these slight alterations, the eye still alighted upon the same broad, level, frozen surface. Men stood huddled together, in groups by the river-side—sailors talking of the best measures of securing their ships before the ice broke up; wharfingers consulting about the safest means of shoring-up their wharfs, and preventing the water from washing

away the piles that they stood upon; captains and owners arguing whether it would be best to lay the broadside or the head of the vessel to the ice, when it broke up; some asserting it was time enough yet, others arguing there was no time to be lost. The reckless said, that it would be two or three days before the ice broke up; the timid, that it would be on the morrow; the cautious, that it was uncertain, and that not an hour ought to be lost. Some said, that the ice had lain so long, it was rotten, and would be torn up by the next tide; others contended that as it was so thick it would be the work of days to rend it asunder; a few, and those the most experienced, declared that they could see it rising every hour, and that the loud reports which almost every moment took place, convinced them, that should the night-tide be a strong one, the vast mass would be torn up, and rent asunder by the next morning. These were laughed at for their caution—a gloom seemed to hang over all the inhabitants, and many, whose interests were vested in the shipping, never went to bed that night.

Even amongst us boys, many a consultation had taken place, and several of us had agreed, that after we were sent to bed, we would dress ourselves, and steal out in the night; for we had heard rumours that the ice had broken up as far as Kidby, that by the next tide it had extended to Ferry; and we knew that when once it had reached Stockworth, and turned the arm of the river at Marton-Flats, it would be upon us in an hour—for we had listened attentively to the remarks of several old, experienced Greenland whalers, and had heard them say, that the blocks of ice which the tide brought forward, would be driven under the vast extensive sheets which yet extended up to the bridge; and when this was once the case, the whole frozen line, that stretched along the town-side, would burst and break up with a report, loud as the firing of many cannons. Night came, and with it, the tide: the moon threw a dim kind of cloudy light over the scene, and as we

listened, we could hear the ice breaking with a loud, sullen roar, a mile or two away; nearer and nearer the deep sound came—those who had gone to sleep on shore were aroused, and hurried off to take charge of the different vessels to which they belonged; at intervals, between each thundering crash of the ice, we heard the hum of human voices on



board the ships; lanterns were hoisted into the rigging, lights blazed and moved along the shore, and many a sailor who had been summoned had not yet arrived at his post, when one long, loud, continued crash was heard, which told that it was the

ICE BREAKING UP IN THE RIVER.

It was unlike thunder, unlike the quick successive firing of cannon, it was as if the earth had split asunder and went on, opening and filling up with masses of fallen ruins, amid the hissing, and surging, and boiling of the troubled waters which it swallowed in its course; for so did the waves roar and heave up as they broke through the ice,—so did the sheets of ice crash and grind together as they were tossed upon each other,—so were the ships torn from their moorings by the overwhelming torrent, and the huge frozen blocks that came thundering against their sides,—so were the masses of water, and ice, and shipping, whirled onward, to where the heavy stone bridge threw its dark shadowy arches over the turmoil, and there they became all locked together, ships, boats, sheets of thick ice, so large that they could not pass through the arches—the vessels blocked up the ice, and the ice the ships, until another mass came thundering on; then masts were snapped asunder like carrots, and vessels went on driving through, and were hurried along far below the bridge, and boats were sunk, and the foundations of the bridge shaken, and over all came the deepening and unceasing roar which could be heard four or five miles away; and farmers came galloping up on horseback from the neighbouring villages to witness the scene, for never before did such confusion reign over that river, and along the shore, and beside the town, as was witnessed on that winter night, when the ice broke up in the river Trent. Nor did the interest end here; for two or three days after we used to find amusement and excitement enough in watching the large blocks of ice as they came floating one after another down the river, for many of these had been thrown upon the shore, and washed off again by the tide—some of them were covered with snow, and were broken up into such fantastic shapes, that as they came floating along we traced in them resemblances to Polar bears, and seals, and white whales, and sharks, and dolphins, and porpoises, and many another monster of the great deep, which we had never

beheld, and so gave to them forms fashioned from the imagination of the moment.

But the greatest charm that Winter brought with it was the Christmas holidays. The knowledge that, for six weeks, we should be freed from the trammels of school, neither pestered with grammar, history, geography, round nor text hand—this was indeed something like a pleasure to look forward to; to know that we should revel among all kinds of games, and merry-makings; and, in place of the formal school diet, feed on mince-pies, and sausages, and spareribs, and turkeys, and roast geese, and such ponderous plum-puddings as would make the old family-cook red in the face only to carry them out of the kitchen into the parlour. Oh! didn't we lick our lips, and rub our hands, and run from one to another, and leap and jump, and shout, through very delight, when the day arrived in which we broke up for Christmas holidays! What a packing up of boxes was there! what a rushing up stairs, and peeping out of chamber-windows, to see if John had come with the light cart, or the pony; or whether the old coachman, who had orders to call, would have room enough on the stage-coach; and what time we should get home; and who would be waiting to receive us; and at the corner of what lane, or wood, or hill-top, we should first catch a glimpse of the smoking chimneys, and sloping roof, of our own happy home! These were, indeed, pleasures to anticipate, and enjoyed all the more because they had yet to come; and we often think now, that the realization scarcely afforded more delight, than the anticipation of when they would come. Then, what visions were recalled of the feasting, and merriment, which was soon to be held throughout the whole country, as we sat mounted on the top of the old stage coach, half buried amid piles of richly-coloured pheasants, and large, long-eared hares, and great black turkeys, that hung dangling by the neck and by the heels, all round the coach; and large, fat, white geese, that

were doomed to be roasted before great comfortable fires; and hampers in which immense fish were curled up, ready to be put into the pot, the instant they reached their place of destination! Why, it almost seemed as if Christmas himself had come out to meet us, and to show us all the good things which were provided, to make merry withal, during this happy season of the year. When home was once reached, then there were a hundred inquiries to make: the kitchen had become such a size; and the puppy had grown into such a fine dog; and there was such an alteration in this; and surely something must have been done at that; the other also was new, and the old one must have been removed; such a playmate, too, was missing; and there were fresh faces at the door of an old, familiar cottage; and we must know the why, and the where, and the wherefore, about all these matters; so that the whole of the first day was spent in inquiries; for we found a subject of interest in every trifle connected with home. Then, what pleasure it afforded us to see the preparations which were made for keeping Christmas! the armfuls of holly, and ivy, and mistletoe, which men, women, and boys went by with, as they returned from the woods! But the greatest of all delights was to assist in decorating our own house with these evergreens; to get upon a chair, and stick a sprig of holly here, and a sprig of ivy there, around the pictures, and around the mirror, and above the book-case; over the door, and over the mantelpiece; and around the portrait of some old ancestor, whose smile had lighted up many a merry Christmas in former days. Pleasant was it also to be awakened by the Waits in the night; to hear the music, first faint and afar off, at the corner of some distant cottage—to listen, for a few moments, until all again was still, and once more be startled with the sound under our very window; on Christmas morning, long before it was light, to listen to some old, simple carol, telling us how our Saviour was born in a lowly stable in Beth-

THE WAITS.

lehem, and that angels first communicated the tidings to the shepherds, who tended their flocks in the field. Or while the cock crowed from some distant farm, to recall the beautiful lines of Shakspeare, where he says,—

“Some say that ever ’gainst that season comes,
Wherein our Saviour’s birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long.”

Then to hear the church-bells throwing their silvery music upon the frozen air, and proclaiming to the hill and valleys, far around, that the dawn would soon break, and usher in the day which brought peace, good-will, and glad tidings to the children of men. And if we drew aside the window-blind, we could see the



VILLAGE WAITS

WINTER.

as they stood before the old parsonage-house, chanting the Christmas carol to some simple tune, which was composed above a hundred years ago. Then came the light which brought in the glad day—its in-door cheerfulness enhanced all the more if the ground was sprinkled over with snow, and a white rime hung upon the cottage-roofs, and trees, and hedges: for then, high up into the clear bracing air, we could see the blue, cheerful smoke ascend, and picture to ourselves the many good things which were already preparing, to celebrate the ancient feast of Christmas; reminding us of a very old Christmas song, which says,—

“Observe how the chimneys
Do smoke all about;
The cooks are providing
For dinner, no doubt.”

And also further telling us what dainties were brought to table, about two hundred years ago, enumerating amongst

——— “the good cheer,
Minced-pies and plum-porridge;
Good ale and strong beer;
With pig, goose, and capon,
The best that may be.”

For plum-porridge is oftener mentioned in these ancient ballads than plum-pudding, and a roast goose seems but rarely to have been wanting at an old-fashioned Christmas dinner. But, above all things, was a boar's head, garnished with bays and rosemary, preferred; and this was brought to table accompanied by a song, beginning with

“The boar's head in hand bear I,
Bedeck'd with bays and rosemary;
And I pray you, my masters, be merry.”

It is pleasant to find, that while feasting and merriment made glad the old halls and feudal castles, the poor were also partakers of the good things: another ancient carol tells us that

“ The poor shall not want, but have for relief,

Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minced-pies, and roast-beef.”

Then, the great yule-log sent its cheerful blaze all over the ample hearth; gilding the ceiling with its cheerful blaze, for there were fireplaces, in those days, capable of containing the root of a tree, which it would require the strength of two men to place upon the andirons; and, in the centre of the large room, there hung the mistletoe-bough, under which all who were caught were compelled to pay the same forfeit: and rare fun was there, when the grave old grandmother was caught as she passed under the mistletoe; and honest-hearted grandad jumped up to give the dear old lady a kiss. Ah! there was a deal of hearty humour in those days, although the manners of our forefathers were much ruder than those of our own time.

It will give a kindhearted boy pleasure to know, that, even in workhouses and prisons, the poor who are confined there, are not forgotten on Christmas-day; but that, for once in the year, they have generally a good dinner provided, which, no doubt, causes them to talk about it long before the joyous day arrives. Still there are many poor families who are unable to procure any thing beyond their hard daily fare at this inclement season; and to such as these, if they are really deserving people, no warm-hearted lad would, I am sure, begrudge to give a good share of his best Christmas-box; and the thought would often bring him comfort in after-days, when he remembered how slight a sacrifice on his part was the means of contributing to the happiness of some poor family at Christmas. Oh! it gives such a zest to the stuffing of the goose; it beats all the sauce that was ever poured over the richest plum-pudding. You recall it, and have no fear of the mince-pies choking you, although you swallow them whole. You sit down and think of it, and the comfortable terms on which you feel with yourself, gives a double enjoyment to the



CHRISTMAS DINNER.

I know but few pleasanter pictures to contemplate, than to look upon a happy family assembled together at Christmas; especially when amongst the group may be numbered uncles, and aunts, and cousins, who live a long way off, and when worthy old grandfathers and grandmothers are still alive to honour the festive scene with their presence. It is such a gathering together of all household affections, drawing closer the ties which unite us to one another; and we often recall the happy picture, when we hear of the well or ill doing of some one, in after years, whom we were often wont to meet at the festive board of Christmas. The image of some fair cousin, whose blue eyes and laughing face lit up with merriment, as she joined in the game of Romps, Blindman's-buff, or Forfeits, and who was the very life and soul of that Christ-

mas party, comes upon the heart with a more tender appeal, when we hear of her unfortunate marriage, her poverty, and her suffering; and the warm soul of the boy once more rises within the thoughtful man, for the very remembrance of past times, and her present sufferings, make her all the dearer to him. The happiness which wealth brings, exists not alone in the comfort it throws around ourselves, but in the good it enables us to do for others, and the pleasure it affords us to know that they were really deserving of our assistance. Extravagance and laziness it is a folly to assist; but poverty, and misfortune, and old age, and sickness have a sacred claim to our help. It is too true, that generous natures, and noble hearts, are often put upon; but better thus than to be suspicious, and selfish, and mean; better relieve even an impostor, now and then, than withhold from all, because a few are not what they appear: for ever bear in mind, that a good deed is still the same, though misapplied, or wasted, by the receiver; and that God causes the "rain to fall upon the just and the unjust," and the same sun to shine upon the evil as upon the good; and that, whilst He bears with all our infirmities, we ought to leave the sin of ingratitude for Him to punish. And now, like a solemn "Grace before Meat," I have ended, and have no wish to keep you serious a moment longer; but, adapting the poetry of Milton's "L'Allegro" to the occasion, am ready to exclaim, "Welcome Christmas!"

"and bring with thee,
Jest and youthful jollity,
Quips and cranks, and wanton wiles,
Nods, and becks, and wreath'd smiles,
Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter, holding both his sides."

Let us leave our elders to gossip about old times, beside the fire; what have we to do with care, who are so young? We have made so hearty a dinner, that, for our own eating,

we would not now give sixpence for all the mince-pies, and plum-puddings, and roast geese in the universe. What shall we do? They have lighted a fire in the large old parlour, purposely for us. What game shall we play at? Shall it be a



SNAP DRAGON,

dance, or turn-trencher, or blindman's-buff, or hunt the slipper? It must be something in which the girls can join us; for, on such an occasion as this, we must be gallant enough to abandon the thought of all out-door amusements for their sakes. What will create the most laughter? Shall it be turn-trencher? Well, then, run and fetch up a large wooden trencher. Now, young gentlemen and ladies, sit down, and take your places in the chairs around the room. It is my first call. Remember, I can call whom I like, and that after I have once set the trencher spinning in the middle of the room, whoever I name, must jump up and catch the

trencher before it falls, or else pay the forfeit. Now then, Miss Smith. Hurrah! it is down! Miss Manner shall be our queen, and name the forfeit she is to pay. Her necklace, and nothing less, will we take,—not any money from the young ladies. It is her call next. Master Williamson! He, also, has missed it, and his money is up stairs in his box. Well, take his silver pencil-case. Only three as yet have caught up the trencher whilst it was spinning, and the forfeits nearly fill Miss Manner's work-basket. All the money shall be spent in something to-morrow, or given to the clergyman, if you like,—he knows plenty of poor creatures who will be thankful for it. "How shall that knife be redeemed?" Our Queen of Forfeits must answer: "He must kiss the chair-back through the tongs." Seize him, boys! if he refuses; he is a rebel who would disobey our queen. Well, then, he is to pay a shilling instead. "This silver pen-holder; what must he do to redeem it?" "Look at the lamp, and never once wink his eyes, for five minutes." "He has lost! he has lost!" and our queen will only let him off by paying. John England has forfeited his musical-box, what says our queen is the price of its redemption? "He must go outside, and whistle, 'God save the Queen!' through the keyhole; and never once laugh all the time." It's no use; he cannot do it: it is first a whistle, and then a laugh. He, also, must compound with her majesty.

"Now, I can tell your thoughts, no matter what you may think, if you will but whisper it to George Herbert, so that no one saving himself shall hear you. I will tell you what you thought of, or what you wished for." "But how?" "Why, he shall name twenty things, if you choose; and I will tell you, out of the number, the very thing you wished for, if it be ever so ridiculous." "Well, we'll try." "You thought, 'How funny Master Anderson's face would look, if his nose were a foot long.' No, Miss, it's no use hanging down your head. Have I not

guessed aright, Master Herbert? And your wishes,—well then, you wished ‘Uncle John might buy you a rosewood work-box.’” And, now, to show you how simple and easy it is to tell both your thoughts and wishes, I must first inform you, that you must have an understanding with the person to whom the secret is whispered, and that, although he may first name a dozen things, which were not told to him, yet, when he mentions the name of either a bird, a fish, or a quadruped, whichever may have been agreed upon between us, what you wished for, or thought, will be the next question he will put. Thus, if you remember, before Master Herbert asked me about the rosewood work-box, he named a black-and white spaniel. But, were I to enumerate all the games we played during the Christmas Holidays, they would occupy half-a-dozen pages, or more, which I must dedicate to matters of greater interest. The morris-dancers, boxing-day, the yule-log, Christmas candles, the wassail-bowl, and many old customs which are now all but obsolete, would interest you very little, were I to describe them; and I shall occupy your time much better by making you acquainted with the human objects which are abroad during the Winter season.

And first I must draw your attention to the single figures and groups which we see wandering along the highways and byways; some journeying onward from one town to another; others turning down winding lanes, or threading their way across posted footpaths—each having some object in view, some purpose to accomplish: it may be a matter of business, of pleasure, or of pain. One is perhaps hurrying along to drive a bargain; another in search of employment; a third to visit a sick relative; another, with slow and reluctant strides, a bearer of the tidings of death. Observe that boy, with his hands in his pockets, his face turned towards the ground whenever he passes any body: he is a runaway apprentice, without money, and not possessing a sufficient knowledge of

business to obtain his living—what will he do? For a few days he will wander about, weary and hungry, having neither end nor aim in view, but picking up a crust here and there, wherever he can, and sleeping, at night, in some outhouse in the field, or beside some haystack, cold as the season is. His poor mother, with aching heart, will shut up her little cottage, and set out in quest of him, wandering, perchance, many a mile before she can gather any tidings of the truant. True, he had a harsh master; was up early and went to bed late, but rarely had a holiday; endured many privations. Yet, when the worst was over; when two years of his apprenticeship had already expired; when he was better able to cope with difficulties and stand up in his own defence,—was beginning to obtain an insight into his business, and every day becoming more useful,—like a coward, he sank under his difficulties, and ran away. Picture him to yourself when he returns, sad and sorrowful for what he has done. He steals homeward in the twilight: he dare not face his master. He sees his mother's house shut up; and ravenously devours the crust of bread and cheese which a kind neighbour gives to him. He finds that his mother is gone to his aunt's, a distance of more than ten miles; and his eyes fill with tears when he thinks how she has worked for him since his father's death, what a kind mother she has ever been to him, and what must her feelings be, when, after so long and weary a journey, she finds he is not there; and he resolves within himself that he will never again run away, nor, whilst he lives, wilfully cause her a moment's pain. The meeting with his mother I will not attempt to portray: tears will flow plentifully on both sides; and both she and his master will pardon him.

Observe that old woman, in the red cloak and gipsy-bonnet, with a staff in her hand, the horned head of which is polished bright through years of long handling. She was never, in the whole course of her life, which now numbers

above threescore winters, beyond ten miles from the village in which she was born: and, now, hers is a mournful errand; for she is going to see her son, who is a prisoner in the county gaol. Although, ever since he was a boy, he has been nothing but a source of trouble to her—still, her heart clings to him, deep as he has plunged that heart into wretchedness, and misery. From garden-robbing and poaching, from drunkenness and gaming, he got, at last, to sheep-stealing; and nothing now will save him from transportation. Poor old woman! she sighs heavily when she thinks of the stain he has thrown upon the fair name of the family. You can see, by her feeble step and sunken eye, that she will not long outlive the disgrace he has brought upon her. Poor woman! she takes no heed of the cold: sorrow has benumbed all other feelings.

Notice that merry pedler, who trudges along, whistling as he walks, and carrying his heavy basket upon his back. For miles around the country is he known: his face is familiar to almost every man, woman, and child. He deals in toys, and combs, and spoons, and graters; sells thimbles, and thread, and tape, and needles, and pins; has a large assortment of pocket-knives, which will do any thing but cut; besides a stock of scissors and snuffers, from which the rivets are always coming out after they have been used two or three times; and, although he calls himself “Cheap John,” and his customers well know that his wares are too dear, even at a gift, still they deal with him: for, they say, he must have a living somehow or other. And then, he has always got some merry tale to tell them. But listen to him, and observe how he is making that old woman laugh who stands within the cottage-doorway; for he is telling her a funny story about old Lindsey, the calico-merchant, his aunt, and his call-pipe. “For you must know,” says he, “that old Lindsey’s aunt, who is very rich, came last week to visit him; and that, as he expects to come into all her money when she dies, why, of course, he did every thing

he could to amuse and entertain her; and, among other things, he thought that it would be letting her see how very industrious he was, if he took her to look over his warehouse. Well, the aunt went very willingly; and greatly was she astonished to see the bales of calico, and the long rows of shelves, and the great counters, that went stretching, I can't tell you how far. But what astonished her most, was a great, long tin-pipe, that ran up beside the wall, and went through the floor into the room above, and into the next room beyond, I can't tell you how high. This puzzled the old aunt strangely, and she could make neither head nor tail of it. After looking at it for some time she at length said, 'And pray, nephew, what's this for?' 'This, aunt,' said he, rubbing his hands, and looking as fussy as a maggot that has climbed out at the top of a Stilton cheese, 'this, aunt, is my call-pipe, and very useful indeed it is; for, you see, if I want to ask any of my men a question, or to call them down, or to go an errand, instead of having to send a message up stairs, or go running all the way myself, I have only to apply my mouth to the bottom of the call-pipe, and then whoever I want answers me. You shall see—you shall see; I will call to Mr. Wigglestone;' and, putting his mouth to the pipe, he called out, 'Mr. Wigglestone, come down; I want you.' 'Now, aunt,' said he, 'if you apply your ear to the end of the tube, Mr. Wigglestone will answer me.' And Mr. Wigglestone did answer him; for he thought it was the mischievous errand-boy who had called, and whose voice was not unlike his master's, and who was constantly shouting up the call-pipe to the men; and when they came down, hiding himself, in any hole or corner, out of sight. Mr. Wigglestone, thinking that the errand-boy was at his old tricks, hollaed as loud as he could into the ear of the aunt, who was attentively awaiting the answer, 'I'll Mr. Wigglestone you, when I come down, that I will; I'll break every bone in your body.' I leave you to guess the old aunt's astonishment; she said Lind

sey had done it on purpose to insult her. So poor Wiggleston got turned away, as the master thought the language was addressed to him, and Lindsey is likely to lose the fortune he expected his aunt to leave him; and all this through the call-pipe." A right merry fellow is that hardy pedler, and cares no more for the frost than a dormouse, when it is wrapped up warm and comfortable in its winter's sleep.

See those two fellows, in canvass trowsers, striped shirts, and straw hats, striding along, and joking. Ten to one they never sailed upon the ocean in their lives; and yet, at the first village they come to, with gruff voices, not unlike the roaring of the sea, they will begin to bawl out lustily some stormy sea-song, about Jervis, or Duncan, or Howe, or Nelson; and, when they have filled their pockets with halfpence, go to the tap of the village alehouse, and there sit, and drink, and smoke, and laugh, while they chat over their roguery, and rejoice that they have taken in the simple country people by passing for sailors.

That old man plodding along, with his arms folded; is driven about, like a shuttlecock, from one parish to another—all refusing to relieve him, because he cannot properly prove to which one he belongs. Here he was born, and there he was married, and further on he lived for a number of years; and, in the village he has just left, he last rented a house. Poor old man! he is literally driven from pillar to post; from one overseer to-day, to another to-morrow. Pity, that one who has no other fault than that of being poor, which is a misfortune he cannot help, should thus be left, with his grey hairs, to wander, "homeless, amid a thousand homes!"

Many animals, as well as insects, pass the whole of the time during the cold winter months in a torpid state, from which they are only aroused by the approach of the warm days of spring, when the earth furnishes them once more with abundance of food. Others, like the

THE DORMOUSE.



DORMOUSE,

lay up a store of provision before they retire to their winter nests, when, should they chance to be aroused by the mildness of the weather before spring arrives, they then devour a portion of their food, and again sink into a state of unconscious slumber. You would be delighted, could you but see the little dormouse asleep in its winter's nest; there it lies, like a ball tied round with a piece of string, for so does its tail curl over its head and around its back, as if it had tied itself together before it went to sleep, lest it should come undone, and so awaken. You would also be amused to see it when it is awake, and sits up eating, taking its food in its hands (for so I must call its fore-feet), like the squirrel, and munching away at hips and haws, or a fallen acorn, or whatever it can find at the foot of the trees, or below the hedgerows, where it gets as fat as a little pig, before it creeps into its warm nest, then shuts up its large black eyes, and bids the world "Good night!" until warmer days draw near. It loves silent and solitary places, far away from the abodes of men, where it leads a quiet, inoffensive life, and brings up its little family of blind dormice, and attends upon them

until they can see, and provide for themselves; then leaves them to play in summer, and get fat in autumn, and sleep soundly throughout the cold winter, without a care; just as their grandfathers and grandmothers did before them, for many a past generation.

Another animal which lays up a store of food for winter, is the Long-tailed Field-mouse. You never saw such a larder as these little rascals keep: seeds of every description that they can get hold of; corn enough, if ground, to make a little pudding; and nuts, real brown-shellers, such as you would like to sit and crack after dinner; with no end of acorns: and these they conceal in their nest underground, or beneath the roots of trees; and when they have nothing else to eat, they fall to and devour one another; and rare fighting there is between them sometimes, for if one long-tailed field-mouse chances to be a little less, or a little weaker, than the other, he knows it is no use sitting down and arguing with the stronger one, who has made up his mind to dine off him, so up he jumps and fights it out; and it sometimes happens that the little one has the best of it, and then the larger one is glad enough to run into any hole or corner, and go without his dinner for that day.

Hogs, which feed in the forest, as I have before told you in Autumn, sometimes chance to stumble upon the hoard which the field-mice have concealed, and then they grunt, and root, and champ away, much to the dissatisfaction of the long-tailed little gentleman, who sits huddled up in the dark corner, looking on, and saying to himself, no doubt, "I wish it may choke you, you great, grunting brute, that I do. There go my poor acorns, a dozen at a mouthful; twelve long journeys had I to the foot of the old oak, where I picked them up,—such a hard day's work, that I could scarcely get a wink of sleep at night, my bones ached so; and now that great glutton gobbles them all up at a mouthful, and thinks nothing about it!

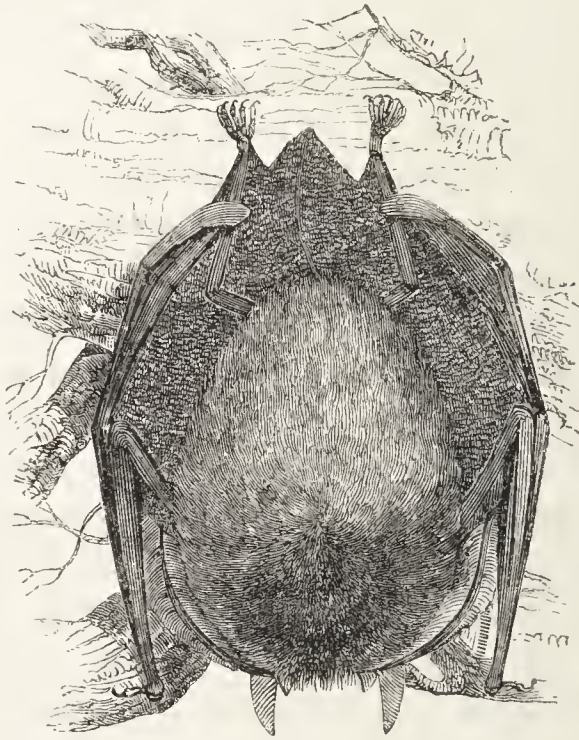
Whatever I shall live on in winter, I don't know! There goes my corn, too! which I brought, by an ear at a time, all the way from the field on the other side of the forest, and which I was often forced to rest with two or three times before I reached home, and then I sometimes had to lay one down, while I fought with a field-mouse who had got a longer tail than myself, and who tried to take it away from me, under pretence of helping me to carry it home, which I knew well enough meant his own nest; and after all this fighting, and slaving, and carrying heavy loads from sunrise to sunset, packing it up so snugly together, and even picking up every loose grain that fell out, here comes a pair of great grunting pork chaps, which I hope some day to see salted and dried, and eaten up, just as he is devouring my winter stock. Never mind, Mr. Pig, it's winter now; but, perhaps, by next harvest time I shall creep into some reaper's basket, and have a taste of you, when he brings a part of you, nicely cured and cooked, and laid lovingly between two slices of bread. I'll be one with you, then, old fellow! that I will, if I'm only spared." And so he creeps out—scarcely knowing whether he should make his mind up to beg, borrow, or steal—half-muttering to himself, as he hops across to visit some neighbour, for a breakfast, "I declare such infamous treatment is enough to make one dishonest, and never be industrious again!"

"Bat, bat, come under my hat!"

was one of our boyish cries, as, with hat in hand, we tried to capture the little animal, when it flitted to and fro, in the twilight, on its leathern wings, in pursuit of insects, sometimes flying so low as to come within a yard or two of the ground. In those days we knew nothing of its curious habits, nor how it concealed itself in dark places, and slept away the winter. We looked upon it as something that was half bird, and half mouse—unconscious, then, that it was a quadruped,

WINTER.

and brought forth its young alive; and numbers of boys, unless they chance to be well read in natural history, will be as much surprised at the facts I am about to narrate, as I myself was when I first became acquainted with them. Just fancy a hairy and leathern-winged



BAT SLEEPING

for three or four months during the winter, when he neither troubles himself about bed nor blanket, but, flying into the first dark cave he can reach, or under the shelter of some old ruin, beneath the roof of a church, within the hollow of a tree, or in the most secluded and darkest part of the woods, he just turns in, hangs himself up by his heels, or hinder-claws, and, with his head downwards, sleeps much more comfortably than if he was tucked in, in the best feather bed. Another comes, and sticks his claws in the wall, or wood, an inch or so above him, and covers up his companion, like a blanket; and thus they frequently hang, dozens to-

gether, keeping one another warm until the return of spring. Although I have called the organs, by which the bat is enabled to support itself in the air, wings; yet so differently constructed are they from those of a bird, that naturalists have compared the skin, or membrane by which it is enabled to fly, to the silk stretched upon the ribs of an umbrella*; for to such may the fingers which open and close, and support this skin or wing, be compared, and which they can fold or unfold at pleasure. The arm, or centre of the wing, for such it appears when in the act of flight, is furnished with a sharp, hooked nail, called by naturalists the thumb, which not only is of great assistance to them while walking upon the ground, but also, if the surface is rugged, enables them to climb up the most perpendicular heights; for, wherever they can once fix this hooked nail, there they have at once a firm and secure hold. But, of all walkers, the bats are the most ungainly; the motions of an old man, with a dozen corns upon his feet, would be graceful, compared to theirs: first, the arm is extended, and the hook planted firmly upon the ground, then the body is moved forward by means of the hinder foot, which is placed under it, as if it were a lever,—and it is only by giving itself a purchase now and then, that it is able to get along; it is first a hook, then a lever, then another hook, as if a lame man, instead of using his crutches, knelt down, and, resting upon his thighs, tried to lever himself along—which he would not be able to do; yet, such an attitude is the nearest that approaches the motion of the bat, though, I fear, I cannot so express my meaning as to make it clearly understood. You must get a bat the first opportunity you have, if you want to see a new motion, which can neither be called walking, running, hopping, crawling, nor jumping, and yet, in some measure, resembles all these movements;

* For many of these facts I am indebted to "Bell's History of British Quadrupeds." Edit. 1837.

but you must look at the bat, and see how it manages to lift itself along. I well remember, when boys, it was our belief that if the bat once settled upon the ground, it could not rise again; that if the chamber window was left open it would come in, and suck our blood in the night, while we were asleep, and do its work so gently as never once to awaken us during the operation: but all such nonsense as this has long since been exploded, and a more innocent, harmless, and amusing little animal than the bat does not exist in our climate; for it may be rendered so tame as to eat out of the hand, fly about the room, and even take its food from your lips. And, oh! how it would amuse you to see a bat clean itself! thrusting its little hairy head, like a brush, underneath its leathern jacket, and rooting out every particle of dirt and dust from every hole and corner, with its snout, just as a cleanly servant-maid would do with a brush to get out the particles of dust from the angles of a room; and sometimes it will part the hair down the middle of its back, and make itself quite smart. The bat is supposed never to have more than a single young one at a time, and this she wraps up in the lower part of the membrane, or hinder portion of the wing, covering it up as with a cloak, and carrying it about with her. When kept tame, they will feed upon raw meat; and it frequently finds its way into the larder, where, fastening itself upon the whole joint, it sometimes makes a hearty meal, without asking the owner's permission. But what think you to most of the bats having four ears, two of which seem for use, and two for ornament; or, perhaps, to keep the cold out of its larger ones, instead of stuffing in wool: indeed, I cannot tell you for what purpose this second pair of ears is ordained, neither have I met with any work on the natural history of the bat which has thrown any light upon the use of the tragus, or inner ears. You will observe this tragus in the engraving of the



LONG-EARED BAT;

but, unless you were to see the animal yourself alive, you could form no idea into what beautiful forms it can throw those long ears: neither your horn-lopped, half-lopped, oar-lopped, nor perfect-lopped rabbits, are to be named beside this bat, for the elegant shapes into which it will curve its ears, But the most singular thing is, that these long and beautiful ears are folded under its arms or wings, when it is asleep; it is then that the tragus, or shorter ears, only are visible: and were you to see it in its torpid state, hanging by the heels, its long ears folded, and its shorter ones only dangling down, you would scarcely believe it was the same animal which you had before seen. Then there is another species, called the Horse-shoe Bat, which is entirely devoid of these lesser ears, and the construction of whose nasal organs I could not make you comprehend; for such a complication of noses (and I know not by what other name to call them), were surely never planted upon any face saving that of the horse-shoe bat's. There are about twelve different species of bats, natives of this country, and amongst them are the notch-eared, and the long-eared, and the lesser long-eared, the horse-shoe, and the mouse-coloured, and the parti

coloured, together with the reddish grey, and the pigmy, and the whiskered, and one or two others, with such names as you would scarcely be able to pronounce. But the



COMMON BAT, OR FLITTER-MOUSE,

you all of you must have seen; for where is there a town or village without it in England; and what boy has not stood and watched it, as it flitted up and down the street, in the dim, grey, evening twilight, in the pursuit of insects; or seen it peep from under the eaves of the houses; its little head every now and then visible, like a mouse peering from its hole, until, watching for a favourable opportunity, out it would rush, and seeming to be here, and there, and every where, in a few moments, while hunting for its prey; feeling, no doubt, as happy and contented as the merriest boy that is out playing in the street.

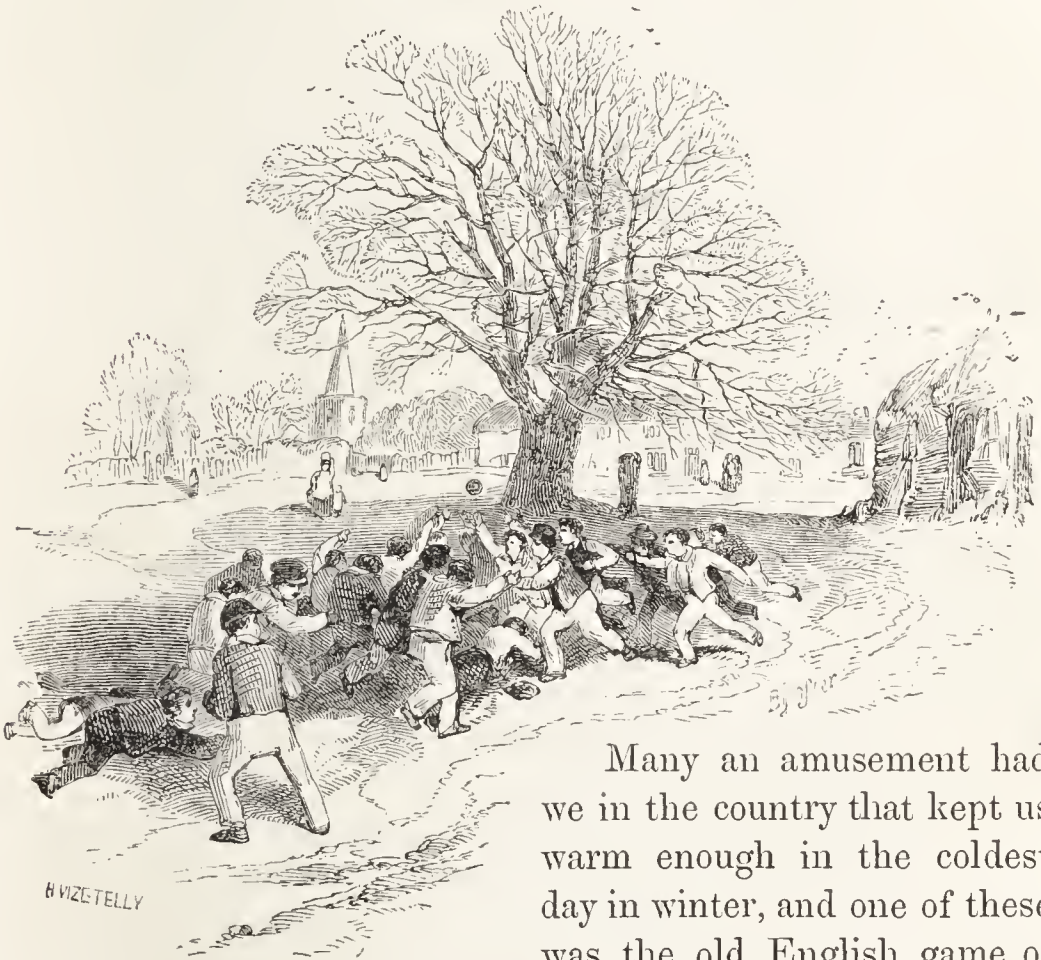
And now I will tell you a true tale about a poor country man who once came to Retford fair to buy a cow, and what kind of one he got for his money. He chanced to be smoking his pipe at an alehouse, after the fair was over for the day; and whilst there, he began to deplore his ill luck in not having been able to meet with a cow that suited him. "What sort of a cow is it you want?" said Dicky Varney, who was one of the wittiest tailors that ever sat cross-legged upon a shopboard.—

“Why, my old dame at home would like a red and white cow, not over large,” answered the countryman.—“A red and white cow,” said Dicky, as if musing for a moment; then turning to one of his old cronies, he said, “Don’t you think that little thing of mine, which I showed you the last time you took tea at our house, would suit him?”—“I should say it would be the very thing,” replied Dicky’s companion, who had seen the cow. “But does it yield milk pretty freely?” inquired the countryman; “for my old dame bade me be very particular about buying one that had a good supply of milk.”—“Milk!” echoed Dicky, “hey, that it does; just touch it, and there’s a cupful at once! you never saw such an easy cow to milk.”—“And is it quiet, and not a kicker,” asked he.—“Quiet as a lamb,” answered Dicky; “and so you’ll say the moment you see it, and as for cleanliness, I never saw such a cow.”—“Well then,” continued the intended purchaser, “if we can only agree about the price, and you’ll warrant the cow to be, what you say it is, why I’m your customer.”—“The price,” said Dicky, “is eight pounds, and I’ll warrant it to be every thing I’ve said.”—“I’ll take your word,” said the countryman: “here’s your money at once. Give me a written warrant for all you’ve stated, and if she does not turn out what you say she is, I will return the cow in six months.” The tailor called for pen and ink, and wrote out the receipt in full, stating, the cow was red and white, yielded her milk freely, was as quiet as a lamb; that he had had her three years, and she looked just as young as she did on the first day he bought her, and gave about the same quantity of milk each meal. The landlord was witness to the agreement, and, at the tailor’s request, held both the receipt and the money, until the cow was delivered up to the purchaser. “When shall I see the cow?” inquired the countryman, after he had parted with his money.—“I’ve sent for it now,” answered Dicky Varney; “we are going to have a cup of tea with the landlord in the bar, and after tea I’ll deliver it up to you. Its

a fine moonlight night, and as you say you've only two miles to go, you'll have no trouble in getting it home." The countryman said he was quite satisfied, and after a few minutes had elapsed the landlord came in again, and announced that tea was waiting in the bar. Thither the tailor, with his old crony, and the landlord, and the countryman, all retired. "What a pretty milk-pot!" said the countryman, as he helped himself to milk; "why, I never saw a prettier-looking-thing in my life: a red and white cow! and the milk teems out of its mouth, and its tail curls round for a handle, why its like nature almost."—"Do you like it," inquired the tailor? "hey! that I do," said the countryman; "I should like to have it for my old dame at home, it would please her mightily."—"I'm glad of that," said Dicky, "then you'll both be satisfied. That's the little red and white cow I sold you; gives her milk freely, as you see; quiet as a lamb, and clean as a new sixpence; and what is worth all, and more than we bargained for, is no expense keeping." Oh! you should but have seen the poor countryman's face, it seemed to grow longer every moment you looked at it. "This my cow!" exclaimed he at last; "why, it isn't alive."—"Then you'll never have to kill it," said Dicky; "isn't it every thing I warranted it to be?"—"It is," said the purchaser, "only it is n't alive." I leave you to guess the fun and argument that followed; especially when old Lawyer Trevor chanced to come in, during the evening, to have his glass of brandy-and-water. Beautifully did he lay down the law, until he fully satisfied the countryman that the cow in every point agreed with what he wished to purchase, and even got him at last to confess that it did; "though," he added, while scratching his head, and looking down very sheepishly, "my old dame 'ell find that I'm a greater fool than she ever took me to be, when I carry her home the cow in my pocket." Right merry were they all for the remainder of the night, and it was at last decided, that as the cow-shaped milk-jug, had

FOOTBALL.

cost the tailor half-a-crown originally, the countryman should have it by paying five shillings, which was to be spent in a supper. To this he cheerfully agreed, had his money returned, and took the cow home with him ; and never did the village feast come round, without bringing with it an invitation to the tailor, and his companion, and never did the countryman come to Retford, without drinking a glass of ale with Dicky Varney ; and so ends my tale about the red cow, which I hope you will all add to your stock of Christmas stories.



Many an amusement had we in the country that kept us warm enough in the coldest day in winter, and one of these was the old English game of

FOOTBALL.

Oh ! what good exercise it afforded us ! What a treat it was to get the ball before us, and have it all our own way, until we kicked it clean up to the goal ! As on the ice, in the game

which I have before described, so did we, at football, divide into two parties, taking, perhaps, the whole width of the common, from hedge to hedge, as our boundaries, and throwing down the ball midway. You should have seen what running and kicking there was then! Perhaps some boy had just got his foot uplifted, and was thinking to himself, what a way he should but send it, when another foot was thrust out, unexpectedly, and in a moment it was driven quite the contrary way. What racing there was to see who should first reach the ball after it had been driven a long way! What skill displayed in meeting it by the opposing party! driving it much further back at a stroke than we had been able to send it forward; and often a good player would face the ball, when it was driven towards him at full speed, and, by a well-aimed blow, stop it dead, and send it rolling back again; and sometimes, when we had got it within a few yards of the goal, an unexpected stroke would drive it out again; and in a few minutes it would be seen on the opposite side of the common. Proud were we of our party colours, which hung waving from the naked trees, and fluttering in the winter wind,—blue, or red, or yellow; and when we could not get ribands, we tied up our coloured pocket-handkerchiefs. True, it was a rough game; but what of that? It was suited all the better to the weather; and we had one good rule, which we never swerved from, for if one boy wilfully kicked another, he was fined, and not permitted to play any more that day.

I have often observed amongst boys, that during a walk, there is some one amongst them who has always a favourite object, in one place or another, which he halts to look at. It may be, to peep over the parapet of a little bridge, whose brick arch carries us now dry-shod over the beck, or stream, through which our ancestors half a century ago were compelled to wade; another has a favourite gate, which he steps aside to look over, because it commands a view of some

sequestered spot which he has many a time visited; a third hast he root of some familiar old tree to examine; and a fourth, in climbing an eminence, will invariably turn round at some particular spot. I also, in my accustomed walks have certain landmarks, which arrest my attention beyond all others. I cannot well tell you why, but somehow or another when I reach them, they break up the link of my thoughts, and for a few minutes I find others uppermost in my mind; and this, for a number of times, has been the case with an old house in the county of Kent: there is nothing remarkable about its architecture, neither can its erection date very far back; at the furthest, not more than a century and a half; yet it has the look of having once been a comfortable old English mansion, as if its original owners were men of some substance, and were, what is called, "comfortably off in the world." As a proof of this, it is well known that the lands, which stretch for a mile or more around, in former days belonged to the owners of this mansion; while now, all the ground which belongs to it is that which it stands upon, and a little garden in front, not larger than the foundation of the building itself. There are still beautiful specimens of carved work about the ceilings; and the staircase, although nearly shorn of all its ornamented balustrades, still retains its old ample proportions, and in ruins, bears about it the stamp of better days. But none of these things are noticed by the poor families who pay their weekly rent for each separated room, and so occupy among them the whole of the house. Nobody can tell you who the original owners were, or what position they held in society, or how the lands fell into the possession of others, or by what means it came into the hands of the present occupants; and these very mysteries have in my eyes thrown an interest round the old building. I have hunted amid the neighbouring churchyards, and read the names and dates upon the oldest tombstones, but all in vain: neither from the

living, nor the names of the dead, have I been able to glean any information. There are rumours of long law-suits in former years, how the whole of the property was thrown into Chancery, and that before it was decided who was the rightful heir, one claimant died after another, until only an old grey-headed man was left, bent double with age, and so poor, that no lawyer would undertake to plead his cause—and that he also at last died ; and the house, which had been shut up for years, seemed then to have been forgotten by everybody ; that poor men came, and settled down upon the estate, and there was no one to interfere with them, when they begun to rear rude temporary wooden huts, and to enclose small spaces of ground for their gardens ; until, finding that after the expiration of several years no one molested them, they became bolder, and built more substantial habitations, enclosed larger portions of ground, made a high-road of what had only before been a narrow footpath, and so took possession of the estate. Then it is rumoured that others followed with more daring and less industry, who when they shook the door at the front of the old mansion, and found that the rusted lock fell upon the floor, and that a few startled bats, which they aroused from their wintry sleep, were the only occupants, and that there was no one to dispute their possession—they then tore up the fences, and kindled fires in the rusted grates, while the flames flickered upon the cold damp hearth, which had been dull, and desolate, and fireless, for many and many a year. And strange traditions still float about the neighbourhood, of that tall, gaunt, raw-boned old man, and his two sons, who on a dark winter-night shook the rusted lock from the door, and took possession of the old mansion. Of the dogs they kept, and the parks they plundered, and the deer they brought home, and of the travellers they waylaid. And how that old man and his two sons were at last transported, and the woman, who belonged to them, left alone in that large solitary house, where she lived for years,

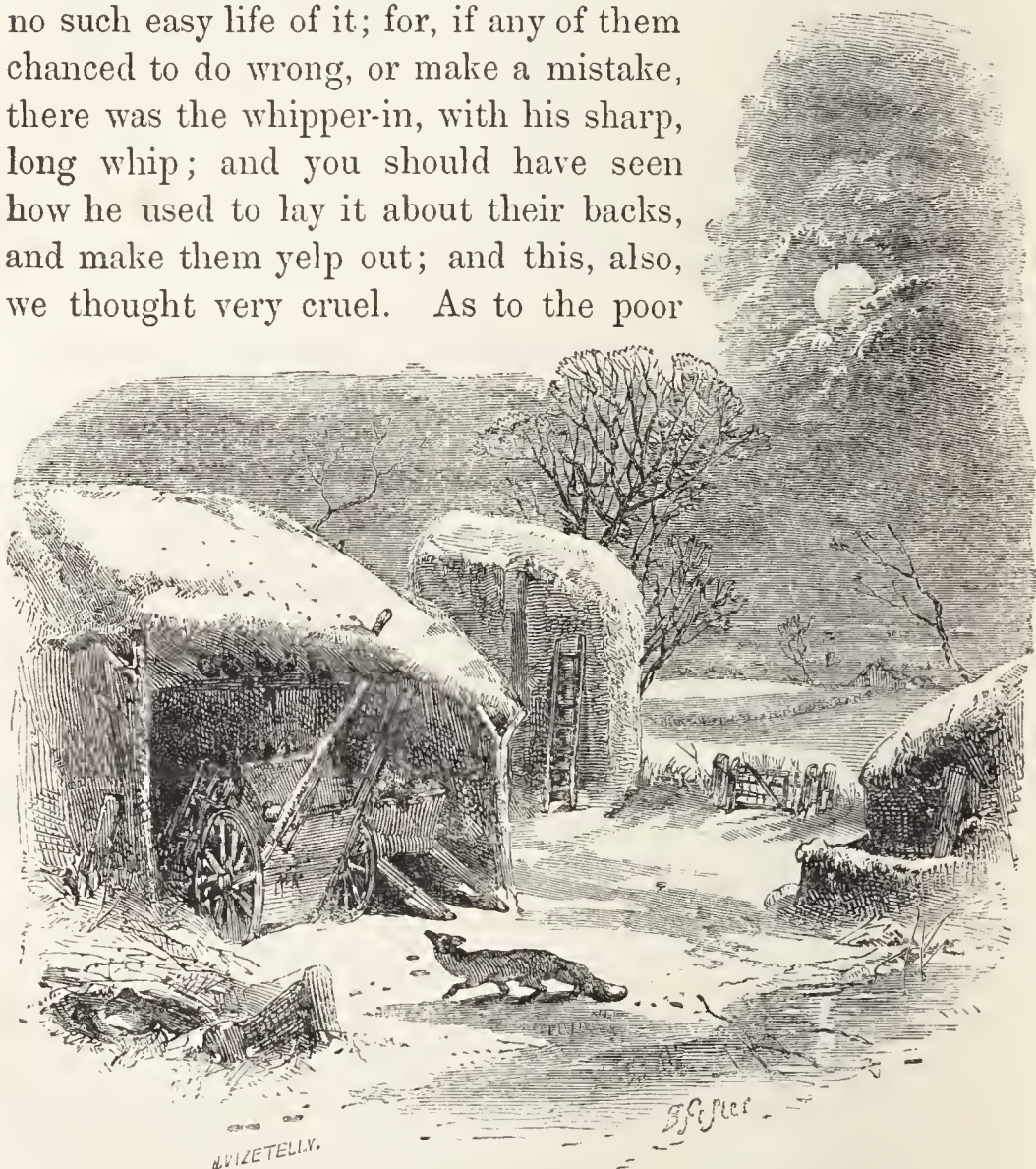
and seldom spake to any one, and was at last found dead in her bed. And how the strange old woman who came and laid her out, claimed the few things which were left behind; and when she had buried her, and taken possession, she let out one or two of the rooms to persons of suspicious character--and so from time to time, the inhabitants changed, until the descendants of the man, who had first erected his hut upon the estate, demanded the rent from the poor lodgers, and, by the aid of a needy lawyer, managed to get so firm a hold of the mansion, that his claim was never afterwards disputed. These changes have often caused me to conjure up in my fancy the original inhabitants of that ancient mansion; there is not a better built, or a more commodious or substantial, house, for miles about the neighbourhood; and I have often thought, that he who first erected it, did so with an eye to the comfort of his children's children, who might follow him for many generations: that he had often pictured to himself the merry Christmases which would be held beneath that strong oaken-raftered roof; how the mistletoe would hang in the centre of that lofty ceiling, and the cheerful fire-light flicker and play upon the carved work that went round it; how in his fancy he saw barns well stored, and conjured up the lowing cattle which would be scattered over the surrounding pasturage; nor ever once dreamed of the strange faces which would look out of those small leaden-cased windows; nor of the squalid misery which would sit squatted on every floor of that once comfortable home. I have often thought that he might be one of those old-fashioned English gentlemen, whose chief pride was in his family, and the cultivation of his estate; that he sometimes rode to London in the quaint costume of the period of George the First, put up his horse at one of those old-fashioned inns (like the Talbot) in the Borough, that he may have ridden past Kennington Common on his way home, when rebels were beheaded there, and over Peckham Rye, and up Forest Hill, when there was no other

road which led into London from that part of Kent; for in those days farmers used to wait for each other at "The Fox," under the hill, beyond Camberwell, and ride home in company together; and saving the old solitary house, now "The Plough," which stands in Lordship's lane, and the little village of Dulwich, with its ancient College far away to the left, not a human habitation was visible on this side of the Norwood Hills; and the very names of Blackheath and Shooters' Hill, which lay to the right, struck terror into the hearts of travellers, for they were infested by fearless footpads, and daring highwaymen, who rode only on thorough-bred, and fleet blood-horses, and could, if pursued, gallop into the wooded neighbourhood of Penge, Sydenham, or Norwood, and there conceal themselves in safety, until some opportunity presented itself, when they stole into their well-known haunts in the metropolis. Many another picture of the past age has that old house called up in my mind, as I have looked around upon the landscape, and fancied what it must have been when that mansion was first built. Then the woods stood undisturbed as they had done for centuries, until at last a few houses sprung up, and a long canal was dug, which went stretching for miles across the face of the country; then its waters were drained off, and its banks levelled to the ground, for there came another, and a mightier change; hundreds of men were assembled, and dug a deep road through the very heart of those old hills, and a railway was laid down, and the smoke from rapid engines went floating over the roof of that old mansion, and such groans, and hisses, and shrill whistles were heard, as had never before startled the silence of that scenery; and if we look over the landscape at night, we shall see those fiery monsters, flying along, thundering and groaning, as if the speed was not half quick enough for them—as if they wished to leave their iron wheels behind, and be at the end of the world in a moment. You see a fiery mouth—it snorts, and scalding

steam comes from its nostrils. In the dark night, you see him flying along, his great red eyes glaring for a few moments, and then they are out of sight in a minute; and you marvel on what mission they have gone. Presently up comes a long black line of carriages, containing more passengers than there are inhabitants in many an English village; and all these have been brought a distance of fifty miles within two brief hours. There are no jaded and wearied horses to feel sorry for: neither whip nor spur have been used; no torture has been inflicted, for the monster that whirled them along with such rapid speed is made of iron, and fed with fire, and can travel more miles in one hour than the old wagoner, with his heavily laden wain, will accomplish between sunrise and sunset.

Sometimes, during our holidays, we went a few miles to see the Foxhunters throw off; and, although I think it is a very cruel amusement to chase a poor fox over the face of the country, and when he can run no longer, to set on a pack of hounds to worry the poor thing to death; still, it was a pleasing sight to see the splendid horses, and the hunters in their scarlet coats, and the clean, well-fed hounds running about the woodside, and the groups of pedestrians, scattered here and there. And although, from my heart, I always wished that the fox might escape, yet I liked to see the horsemen start off at a brisk gallop, leap over gates and hedges as if they were mere mole-hills; over the fields, far away would they be in a few minutes, the poor fox heading the way, and trying to baffle the hounds by all kinds of twists and turnings, running, sometimes, even upon the top of a hedge, for a few yards, as if conscious that his scent betrayed him; or dashing clean through a flock of sheep; and, when hard pressed, sheltering at the far end of a narrow drain under the road, and, when driven out again, looking so jaded and dirty, that from your very soul you pitied him. But the huntsmen had no mercy: true, the hounds were kept back a few moments, to give him another fair start; but, poor

fellow, he was then so weary, that he seemed as if he could scarcely drag one leg after the other, while the fox-hounds seemed almost as fresh as when they first started; and then there were so many to one, that our downright English notions could never be brought to think it was fair. And yet the hounds had no such easy life of it; for, if any of them chanced to do wrong, or make a mistake, there was the whipper-in, with his sharp, long whip; and you should have seen how he used to lay it about their backs, and make them yelp out; and this, also, we thought very cruel. As to the poor



FOX ROBBING A HENROOST

now and then; true enough, it was very annoying; but, if the henroost had been well secured, he could never have got in; and what if he occasionally got a goose by the neck, and, throwing

it over his back, scampered off with it into the wood,—it surely was hard that fifty savage hounds should be set upon him for that. And how could he tell that the goose was any body's property? And, supposing he did know, he might think that out of so many, one could be spared. Nor is this all: many a beautiful horse has been ridden to death during a hard foxhunt; some have dropped down dead, in a moment, in the field; others, while leaping fences, have alighted upon sharp stakes, and their agony has been so great that it was an act of mercy to kill them upon the spot; to say nothing of the damage that is done to turnips, and of fields cut up that are sown with corn, the havoc made in the poor farmers' fences, and the accidents which often befall the hunters themselves, such as breaking their bones, and sometimes their necks, whilst leaping over a five-barred gate: leaving alone all these serious matters, it is still a cruel pastime; and all that can be gained is the poor fox's brush, which, really, is worth nothing. For my part, I like to see his black feet dinting the winter snow.

And, oh! what an appetite would a run of this sort give us! You have heard the saying, I make no doubt, of "as hungry as a foxhunter." How hungry that is, I will leave you to judge from what we were, when I tell you that we have, before now, eaten up the whole of a large, cold, raw turnip. "And where did you buy it?" inquires some very conscientious boy. I must at once tell him, candidly, that we never bought it, but stole it; and we should have thought the owner of the field a most unfeeling, niggardly fellow, if he had begrudged us one of his turnips. "But a dozen of you, perhaps? and to take one each?" Well, that would not be more than a penny value, in a remote country village. And how many dozens should you think the hunters would trample and shiver into pieces, as they went galloping across the turnip-field with their horses? We took them, and ate them;

and that is the truth of the matter? And right glad we were to find any thing at all we could eat; and no one was ever so foolish as to think of punishing us for so trifling an offence; for, somehow, although it was wrong, we managed to reconcile our consciences to the deed. There was a great field, of many acres, covered with turnips, and we so hungry that we could not wait until we reached home, to have our dinners; besides, if we had left a farthing apiece near the gate-post, who was there to receive it? No! no! my boys, we had none of those qualms; and if you never do worse than pull up a turnip and eat it, when you are hungry, depend upon it, you will never get into much trouble. Besides, we lived amongst a race of generous farmers, who would as soon have thought of refusing a poor, half-starved beggar a crust, as of begrudging us the turnips we had taken. There are mean fellows in the world, who, if they could discover that a boy had accidentally done them a farthing's worth of damage, would storm and bluster, and lay down the law, and talk about a summons and a magistrate, and I know not what beside; such as these are neither beloved by men nor boys, and a wise lad will never venture upon their grounds.

In the centre of the beautiful river Trent, which I have so often told you about, and a few miles above the bridge, there stood a little island, which contained from two to three acres of land. Rumour said that it had been separated from the main land many, many years ago, during a very heavy winter's flood; that the banks of a watercourse, which partly divided it from a neighbouring field, had been washed away, and ever after the river current set in on that side, and from year to year continued to widen the breach, until at last the island was left in the middle of the river. Now, of all places for miles around, this island was our favourite spot; and during a half-holiday, or whenever we could spare time to row so far, we never failed to visit it. In winter it was a place of great

resort for the wild fowl; and there we frequently met with



THE LONG-LEGGED PLOVER,

or, as it is called by some, the Stilt; for, according to the proportion of its body, it is the longest legged bird that is known, and is beautifully marked with white, and glossy black, and grey, and a variety of fanciful dusky streaks. It was seldom seen anywhere about this neighbourhood, saving on and around the island; and many a chase has it led us boys, as if it knew how fleet it was of foot, and delighted in running on a little way, then squatting down again, until, at last, as if to show what it could do, it would put its best leg foremost, or take to its wings, and, with its long legs hanging behind, be out of sight in a few moments. There was something about this island which suited our youthful and romantic fancies; and, as it seemed to have no owner, we used to look upon it as our

own, to fancy ourselves Robinson Crusoes, or any other travellers whom we had read about, that had been wrecked, and lived for many years upon uninhabited islands, where they never heard the sound of any other human voice saving their own. A strange, pleasurable feeling did it awaken : to be surrounded every way by water ; to know that scarcely any one ever landed there, except during winter to hunt for the wild fowl ; and that there were great hollow places in it, overhung with willows and tall tufted reeds, where we could hide ourselves for hours, and no one, unless they searched very narrowly, could find us again. At last an old man, whom nobody knew, came and took up his abode on that solitary island. He rowed up the river in the night in a boat, and next morning, when the villagers went out to milk in the river-marshes, which stretch on each side of the island, they were astonished to see the blue smoke rising up from the centre of it, at so early an hour. What fish he caught he hawked round, and sold at the adjacent villages ; but rarely speaking to any one, unless to name the price he asked, or when he went into some little shop to purchase such necessaries as he needed. There was something rather stern, and cold, and forbidding about his manner ; and many remarked, that they thought he had seen a great deal of trouble ; others, that he appeared as if something weighed heavily upon his mind ; while a few believed that he had committed some dreadful crime, and had taken up his abode on that solitary island, to shelter himself from the pursuit of the law. Be this as it might, he soon began to erect himself a hut ; and I was one amongst the few who dared to venture there after he had landed, for there was something about the manner of the old fisherman which I liked ; and, however cold and repulsive he might be to others, to me he was always kind ; and go whenever I wou'd, even on the coldest day in winter, I had only to shout—for he knew my voice well—and he would fetch me across in his fishing-

THE OLD FISHERMAN.

boat; for there was always a cheerful fire blazing on the hearth of his little hut. But I must tell you his history in the little poem which I have written, and entitled,—

THE OLD FISHERMAN.

John Wimble was a fisherman,
Whose locks of iron grey hung down,
Curling upon his shoulders broad;
He had seen threescore winters frown
Above his head on land and sea,
And was at last moored tranquilly.

His face was brown, by winds made hard,
His voice was deep, and clear, and loud,
And had been heard o'er many a storm:
His brow had also once been proud;
But age had left its track behind,
Like sea-shores worn by wave and wind.

A smuggler in his youth was he—
Few knew the name he bore when young;
But of that crew he was the last,
The rest were shot, or drowned, or hung;
And many a dreadful tale he knew,
Of that swift ship, and fearless crew.

He long had left that dangerous life,
And up the river lived alone;
Upon an island on the Trent,
Within a hut he called his own,
With no companion, save when I,
A boy, could bear him company.

He loved to row his boat by night,
When all around the air was still,
To bait his hooks, and cast his lines,
Where shadows deepened 'neath the hill.
'T was then he sung some old sea-stave,
While drifting on from wave to wave.

WINTER.

Or seated where the willows drooped,
Gazing upon the vaulted sky,
He'd fold his arms in thoughtful mood,
While tears gush'd from each deep sunk eye ;—
I marvelled then—but since that time
Have found how thoughts and feelings chime.

Some deemed he was a surly man,
But they knew not his griefs and fears,
How he had been beloved by one,
Whose image lay “ too deep for tears,”
To which his heart unchanged had stood
Through breeze and battle, fire and flood.

He had no kindred whom he knew,
No social converse to enjoy.
He left his village-home when young,
But came not back again a boy.
Year after year had come and gone,
His parents died, nor heard of John.

Year after year—long were they dead,
When home he journeyed o'er the waves,
Garden and cot were desolate—
One night he spent beside their graves ;
Then on that island lone and drear,
He built a hut, and sheltered there.

How first I won the old man's love
It boots not now for me to tell ;
I went his journeys to the town,
I strove my best, and pleased him well ;
And for him many a time forsook
My home, my playmates, school, and book.

And many a tale was my reward,
How ship chased ship upon the sea,
' Mid rolling waves, and stormy winds,
And thunders pealing dreadfully,
While lightnings flashed athwart the deep,
And lit each wave and rocky steep.

THE OLD FISHERMAN.

Of gory decks, and yard-arms joined,
When ships were boarded hand to hand,
How they the burning vessel fought,
With dirk and pistol, blade and brand,
Till loud the dread explosion rung,
While mast and spar around were flung.

How some jump'd shrieking in the waves,
And some were heav'd up in the sky,
The dead and dying side by side ;
While yell, and shout, and piercing cry,
Joined with the cannon's hollow roar,
Was echoed back from shore to shore.

Then on that little island green
Which to the breeze was ever free,
At evening time before his door,
He'd walk as when on deck at sea,
With one hand on his bosom placed ;
While memory many a past scene traced.

His little bark was moored hard by,
The village bells in distance ringing,
The reeds made music round his home,
And whispered while the waves were singing ;
And here and there a distant sail
Went gliding down the watery vale.

But years have rolled by since he died,—
That island is his resting-place ;
His lonely grave you yet may see,
But of his hut there is no trace ;
And there the wild fowl plumes her wing
While winds and waves around him sing.

Poor fellow ! his is, indeed, a peaceful resting-place, and the green osiers have long since grown to a goodly height, which were planted about his grave. What quantities of bald-coots have I seen swimming around that little island : they seemed to know that they were secure there ; and many a nest have we found in spring amongst the water-flags, which

stood out even into the river, when the tide was high; and sometimes it would rise and float away the nests, while the little black coots, which were within, went sailing away down the stream—the old ones swimming around all the while, as if they were at a loss to know what to do. A famous diver is the



BALD-COOT,

and no matter how cold it is, underneath it goes. Even the little ones, which are quite black, are enabled to swim a few days after they are hatched; and many a meal does the long-jawed pike pick up as he goes swimming about in quest of prey; for should he chance to see the shadow of a little bald-coot floating on the top of the water, up he comes, and opens his big mouth, and it is gone in an instant.

Many a flock of sea-gulls also came up the river, during a severe winter; and if a gun was fired amongst them, oh! what a clamour they made; and if one was shot, the others would fly around it, hurry off again, then return and wheel again round and round the body of their companion, uttering all the while such a wailing and plaintive sound, as made you feel sorrowful

only to hear it. You would hardly believe that this bird, which scarcely weighs a pound, is able to swallow with ease an eel a foot long, yet such is the fact; and you would be surprised to see with what ease it will cast it up again, if once it is alarmed; and sometimes, after its flight is over, it will again return, and devour the prey it before disgorged. Every boy, who has visited the sea-side, must have beheld these great grey gulls, wheeling and screaming above the waves, seeming to enjoy themselves all the more when the sea is rough; for to wheel, and hover, and wail above the hissing and thundering surges of the ocean, seems ever to be their greatest delight. And an experienced mariner well knows when he may expect a storm by the manner of their flight. While the old fisherman was alive he kept a tame sea-gull, which he had found on the island one morning, in winter, unable to fly; but after his death it went away, and no one knew whither.

The Raven is about one of the earliest birds that begins to build, and has been found "sitting" on its eggs as early as the middle of February, and that too in a severe winter. It often rears its nest near a rookery; and, when its larder is empty, thinks nothing about fetching a little unfledged rook, now and then, to feed its young ones with. It generally selects a large tree to build in, and forms its nest of sticks, lining the inside with wool and hair, which it will gather or steal wherever it can; and will often mount upon the back of some sickly sheep, and strip its skin of the wool; nay, even pick the poor sheep's eyes out, and feed upon them; and many a young lamb has been destroyed by the raven. It is very mischievous when tamed, and fond of snatching up any thing white and glittering; and Montagu, in his "History of British Birds," makes mention of a raven which a gentleman once saw walking off with a silver spoon in its mouth, and, having watched the raven, he discovered its hiding place, and there found a dozen more silver spoons, which had been lost at dif-

ferent times. He is a crafty-looking bird ; and you will often see him standing, with his head aside, as if thinking what new mischief he should next set about : and as for eating, it has an appetite like a vulture, and will prey upon any kind of carrion it meets with. Gilbert White, of whom I have before made mention, tells an anecdote about two ravens building their nest in a large oak, which bulged out so much in the middle of the stem, that no boy, however good a climber he might be, could ever get past this large projection in the centre of the trunk ; so the



RAVENS

continued to build in it year after year, for their nest was unapproachable by the boys, and the oak was long known by the name of the Raven's Tree. At last, the oak had to be felled in the middle of February, whilst the raven was "sitting" upon its eggs ; and although wedges were driven in, and heavy blows struck, which made the wood echo again, still the raven sat upon her nest, and when the tree at last fell, she came down with it, and was struck dead by the boughs as it fell. These birds have very foolishly been looked upon as announcing evil tidings ; and for a raven to be heard croaking near a house, in the night, was considered an ill omen : and I'm sure a sensible boy would laugh outright were

I to tell him all the superstitions which are linked with the raven; as if the poor fellow (rogue as he is) could either help having a natural hoarseness, or being black. They might just as well, and with as much reason, be alarmed at a cricket singing on the hearth, or the cat mewling, or the weather-cock whistling in the wind; for the one would denote about as much as the other; and it puzzles me to know where or how such nonsense originated about the ravens. I well remember a dear old-fashioned aunt, who believed in almost every superstition; nothing hardly moved without having a meaning in her dim old eyes; and with her all things were either "lucky" or "unlucky." It was unlucky, she said, to spill the salt, or lay two knives across, or to leave a waster in the candle, or to go out with a hole in your stocking, or to lend a person your knife; and I cannot tell you how many other things were "unlucky" in her eyes, which sorely perplexed me when a boy; and many a lecture did I endure rather than believe in them. But, since that time, I have found a deep meaning in these things; they were invented by homely old people to make the young ones clean, and careful, and industrious—not to spill salt, nor blunt the edge of the knife, nor waste the candle, nor be untidy, nor lend what you yourself might want before it was returned; and I dare say, the dear old bodies, by the same rule, did not like the ravens to roost near them, in case they should begin croaking too early in the morning, and so awaken them out of a comfortable sleep; for, depend upon it, our forefathers were not quite so foolish as we sometimes think they were. The fairy that was sure to leave a groat on the cleanest hearth, was no other than some forgotten great grandmother, who stole down stairs at night; and if all was clean, and neat, and tidy, and pleased her, put the groat there herself to encourage the servant; and I have no doubt but that there was a good understanding between them, and that the girl knew as well, who

the fairy was, as the old lady did herself. As to the sounds which we sometimes hear in the night, they all originate in natural causes: furniture will creak, and drawers shrink, and papers crackle, and a book sometimes slip off the shelf, and the shutters keep on cracking when the wind is blowing outside, and cinders drop from the grate; and a hundred other sounds, which would not be regarded in the daytime, become audible in the night, and put foolish thoughts into the heads of very weak-minded and cowardly boys; while a brave-hearted lad pays no regard to them, and well knows that there is no more to be feared in the dark than at noon-day, saving from robbers, and men "whose deeds are evil." Many a boy has run away affrighted at a distant object, which, if he had but possessed courage enough to have approached, would have caused him to have laughed at his foolish fears; like the cowardly lad, who chanced to put his hand out of a strange bed in which he had to sleep, and who, on feeling something with a round hairy back, took a strange fancy into his head that a lion had got into the chamber; and when he ventured to put his head out from under the bed-clothes, in the morning, instead of a great savage monster, he saw a large hair trunk. As to boys endeavouring to frighten one another in the dark, that is very wrong; for there are many instances on record in which the results have been serious; and the alarm has produced such an awful shock that they have never again regained their faculties. I well remember a poor boy, who became an idiot through a playfellow coming out suddenly upon him, covered with a table-napkin, as he was passing the church-porch at night. A noble-hearted lad could never forgive himself if he had caused such a calamity to befall any one; and I am sure, after becoming acquainted with such an awful occurrence as this, you will never be so thoughtless, and unfeeling, as to attempt to frighten some poor little companion, because he is naturally timid and superstitious.

I once knew a poor fellow, who went by the name of Simple Sammy, and who often declared, that he never had a shilling he could call his own ; he used to say, that he was born to be unfortunate, and take whatever he would in hand it never succeeded. His whole life, until his latter days, was one scene of petty misfortunes ; he was always in trouble ; meet him whenever you might, something had happened ; and his disasters were generally such as another person would, with common caution, have avoided. " Well, Sammy," some neighbour would say, " have you got a shilling that you can call your own to-day ? " " No," Sammy would, perhaps, answer ; " when I got up I thought I had, but some of those boys had made a slide under poor old Sally Clayton's window, and I slipped aside, and to save myself from falling, thrust my elbow through one of her panes of glass, so my shilling's gone again ; I shall never have one that I can call my own for twelve hours together." Another day if you chanced to meet him with an extra smile upon his face, and he was enabled to say, " Boy ! boy ! I've got one at last ;" on the next his countenance would be changed : either the sole of his boot had come off, or somebody had run away with his hat, or he had lost his knife, and he must have a new one, or something or another, such as no other person would have lost for years ; for he had such a bad memory, that when he had once put a thing down he never knew where to look for it again five minutes after. He was very short-sighted, and wore spectacles ; and many a time has Sammy been seen hunting for them, when all the while they have been mounted astride his nose : and once in the street, when he stumbled over a wheelbarrow, he pulled off his spectacles to see what it was he had fallen over. His spectacles, of course, he often did lose ; and they say that one day, when Sammy went to buy a pair of new ones, after trying a dozen or more on, he selected those which had no glasses in them, declaring, that they were the only pair

which suited his sight; nor was it until two or three days after, when he was about to rub them up a bit in order that he might be able to see better, that he discovered they were without glasses. Sammy was a great snufftaker, and used to buy only black rappee; and one night he chanced to take an ounce of coffee home in the same pocket in which he carried the ounce of snuff he had purchased on that very evening, and by mistake Sammy put half the snuff into the coffee-pot, without discovering what he had done, until after the first drink or two. "It was the strongest cup I ever tasted in my life," Sammy was often heard to say. Another time, he lodged with an old woman, who was a great spinner, and when she had done her work, as she called it, she used to sit down to her spinning-wheel to rest herself. One day, while she had gone an errand, she left some dumplings which she had made, in the cupboard, and asked Sammy to put them in the pot when the water boiled, which he promised to do. When she returned, and inquired how the dumplings were getting on, Sammy said, that they were done, for they had boiled until they were quite hard. Sammy held the dish while she took them up, and the first thing she stuck her fork into, and pulled out, was a ball of yarn of her own spinning. Sammy had put in all the balls of yarn by mistake, and there were the dumplings in the cupboard just as the old woman had left them. Another time, Sammy had been peeling a few potatoes to bake under a bit of meat, which, after he had washed his hands, he took to the bakehouse himself, telling the baker that he should come for it exactly at one o'clock, which he did. But such a baked dinner you never saw—from top to bottom it was covered all over with froth and foam; Sammy had shoved the soap in under the meat, for a potatoe, after he had washed his hands; and instead of gravy he had the lather. Then poor Sammy fancied that he had not very good health, although I often thought that if he had not had a very strong constitution, the messes which people at

times persuaded him to take, would soon have killed him ; for every mischievous wag made a point of prescribing for Sammy, and it was truly scandalous to give the poor fellow such doses as they did. If he was at the blacksmith's shop, they recommended him to try the water in the trough, in which the smith cooled his red-hot iron ; for iron-water they said was a good thing for the inside—Sammy believed, and drank. If at the cobbler's shop, the water in which the cobbler kept his wax-balls was excellent, it stood to sense, they argued, that wax-water must be strengthening ; Sammy had a draught of that too. And well might he never have a shilling to call his own, for after such doses as these, he was compelled to have a drop of brandy, or something or another, to take off the feeling of sickness ; not that I ever remember their giving him anything that was really very injurious. Poor Sammy ! he caused more laughter than all the village put together : they gave him castor-oil to his salad ; inked one of his teeth, then persuaded him to have it drawn, as it was decaying ; and sent him on errands for such things as were never heard of in the world—pigeon's-milk and stirrup oil were stale jokes compared to the purchases they sent Simple Sammy to make. But on this point they were at last beaten ; for the shopkeepers had been so often tricked, that at last they invariably gave Sammy something tied up, which came to the sum he was sent with, and they soon tired of that sport. Sammy once bought a little French dog, as he called it, all woolly about the shoulders and head, and looking behind like a sheep that had just been shorn ; as it was winter-time he took home his new bargain, and, as he said, “ gave it so much to eat, that it was forced to leave off before it had emptied the dish.” But what astonished Sammy was, that it had not lain before the fire many minutes, before it began to yelp, and cry out, and roll about, as if writhing under some dreadful pain ; he patted and rubbed it, but all of no use ; so at last of all he took it on his knee, to see if he

could discover any wound. "Well might it cry out, poor thing!" said Sammy; "they had put a skin over it, and sewn it on so tightly with strong twine, that after it had had so good a meal, it could scarcely breathe, and when I had unripped the stitches and taken the skin off, you never saw such an ugly little cur in your life as it turned out to be." Ugly as it was, however, Sammy kept the dog, and was often heard to declare, that it was the last thing he would part with in the world, and that while ever he could get a crust his dog should have half of it. And many were kinder to Sammy ever after that time, for they knew that however simple might be his nature, he possessed a kind heart.

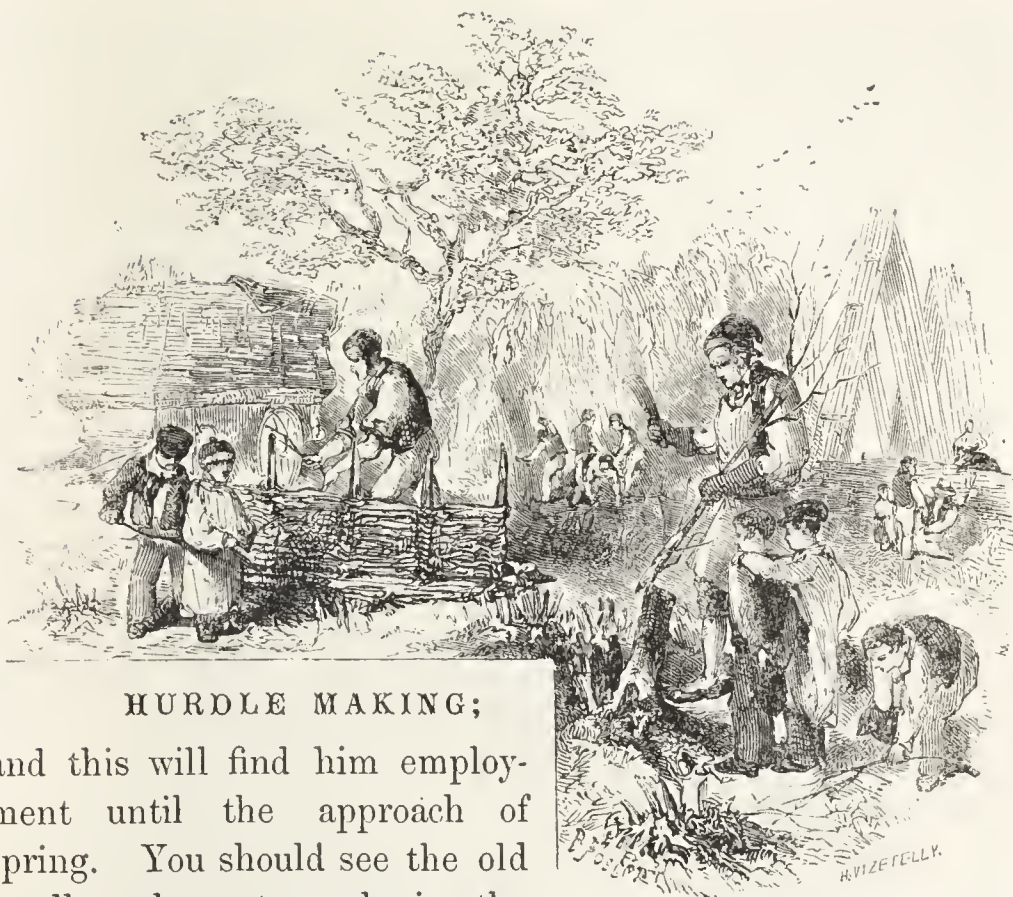
Poor Sammy! he once got into a boat to get a pail of water on the off side where it was clear, when some mischievous boy unloosed the rope, and as the tide was then running up very strong, away he went, without either oar or boat-hook; through the bridge he shot, and far away between the meadows and marshes; nor did he return again until night, when some good-natured sailors took both Sammy and his boat into tow: "It was a pleasant ride enough," he used to say, "but very cold, and I often thought how my bit of dinner would be too much done, that I had left on the fire." One cold winter day, he was sent about two miles with a small parcel, which they persuaded him to put in the inside pocket of his waistcoat, and button himself well up; poor Sammy was not long before he discovered that it was a lump of ice tied up, for as soon as he began to walk briskly, and get warm, it began to melt away. Daft Jimmy, whom I have before told you of, one day chanced to meet Sammy carrying a heavy load, "Why Sammy," said he, "you're softer than I am." "How do you prove that?" inquired Sammy, halting a moment or two with his heavy burden. "Why, because you work, and I don't," answered Jimmy, "and I'm not often without a shilling that I can call my own." Sammy did work, and very hard too,

and his end was very different to Daft Jimmy's; for it was his industrious habits that caused Sammy, in spite of all his simplicity, to be so much respected; for he was ever willing to do almost any thing, or run any where; and so high an opinion had they all of his honesty, that it was not uncommon to hear it said, that any one would trust Sammy with uncounted gold. And although it might be often said that he never had a shilling he could call his own, yet few ever glided through life, who really had so little need of money; for both his clothes and his food were generally given to him; and a wealthy gentleman, who died, remembered Sammy in his will, and left him a shilling a day for the remainder of his life; and this sum, which was paid him weekly, according to the will, poor Sammy did not live to enjoy many years; and he was often heard to remark, "that he was too happy to live long." Many thought that it broke up his old habits, and believed that he would have lived longer, had he remained the same Simple Sammy who never had a shilling to call his own.

I have already given you a description of the garden spider, and I will now make you acquainted with another species, called the Diving, or Water Spider. Ingenious, as we all know the spider to be, few of you, I dare say, were aware that the one I am now speaking of makes itself a kind of nest, or diving-bell, in which it lives securely under the water; and, were you to look down into some clear stream, and your eye should chance to alight upon this singular nest, you would see a little globe, bright as silver,—and this is the watery habitation of the diving spider. When it requires air, it ascends to the surface, its body still partly under water, while it opens that part from which it spins, and, taking in a sufficient quantity of air, sinks down again. One naturalist says, that the diving spider spins in the water, and makes a strong cell, looking not unlike white silk, in the form of half an egg, or diving-bell, which is rounded and closed above,

though open below; but that, in December, he found the opening closed, and, having broken it, the spider came out the instant the air was expelled; and, although it had probably been shut in for the space of three months, yet, no sooner was it liberated, than it seized upon an insect and destroyed it. The diving spider also lays its eggs, which are of a pale yellow colour, in little cells, from which the moisture is extracted, below the water. There is, also, a species of insect called the Social Caterpillar, that pass the winter together in one nest, which is composed of warm woven silk; and many things which you see upon the naked hedges, at this season of the year, that to the eye appear only like dark masses of moss, or dead leaves, which the winter wind has not swept away, are the homes of insects, and, when opened, display such various structures as would astonish you. Neither is it true that the Ants lay up store for winter; for, like many other insects, they pass away the cold months in a state of torpor; so that all you have read about their storing up corn, and biting off the ends to prevent the grains from sprouting, with other things, many of which have been turned into pretty moral lessons, are, in spite of their praiseworthy intentions, nothing more than fables; and, what little we know of the habits of insects, are wonderful enough without requiring any of these inventions.

Amid the silence of Winter, the Woodman still continues his labour of clearing away the underwood; and you hear the "hack, hack" of his axe, as he cuts his way through the bosky thickets, felling hazel, and thorn, and holly, and bramble—setting aside the thickest for besom-shafts, and no end of other purposes; and binding up the refuse in billets to burn: and sometimes a baker purchases a whole wagon load of this firewood to heat his oven with, for the country-people believe that a wood-fire bakes the sweetest bread. When the underwood is all cut down, his next task is



HURDLE MAKING;

and this will find him employment until the approach of spring. You should see the old hurdle-maker at work in the woods: how he sticks his clean, straight stakes into the ground, or the long block of wood in which a number of holes are made; and when these are all placed upright, like a dozen or two of walking-sticks, reared about eighteen inches apart, then he takes up the long, straight shoots of hazel, and weaves them in and out, as you would do a piece of string between, and around your four fingers, until you had covered them all up to the very tips; so does the woodman continue to weave the slender branches between the upright stakes which he has made secure: and were you to watch him attentively for an hour or so, then to go and gather some lighter material that would bend easy, you would be able to make a hurdle yourself. These hurdles are used for fences, or to keep cattle apart, as in turnip-fields, where sheep are confined to a certain space of ground; nor, until they have

consumed all the turnips within the space parted off, are the hurdles removed to another spot, where the turnips are all fresh, and green-topped, and untouched. A cold workshop has the old woodman when winter sets in amid the bleak, leafless woods, through which the biting north-wind blows; and even during autumn he is exposed to many a chilling blast, which causes him to lay down his bill-hook, or axe, and beat both his hands across his breast, jumping up at every stroke, and making such a grunting noise, that, were you not aware of what he did it for, you would fancy the old woodman was mad. If he is a merry old man, and knows you, before he begins to warm his hands and feet as I have described, he will ask you if "you ever saw two thieves beating a rogue?" Then, if you answer, "No," he will say, "Then I'll show you;" and away he will go, beating his arms across, and jumping up, or fetching himself such sharp blows as make the whole wood ring again.

But here is a splendid bird for you, the Great Bustard, which beats the swan, and every other British bird, for size; and often weighs as much as thirty pounds. Is he not a noble looking fellow? And if you could only see one alive, you would be struck with the elegant plumage of brown and black, which marks his back and upper wings, and forms so beautiful a contrast to the lighter colours below. But the most curious thing about the bustard is its immense pouch, or bag, which runs along the fore-part of its neck, and is capable of containing five or six quarts of water. When I tell you that the female generally builds on wide sandy downs, where water is scarce, you will at once see the utility of this capacious pouch; and the many journies it saves the male bird, when, during the breeding season, it has to supply its young with water. I have introduced to your notice a sketch of this noble bird, not only as one of the largest which inhabits England, but because of its scarcity; for, although once so plentiful in our island, it is

GREAT BUSTARD.

but seldom seen now, and, perhaps, in a few more years, will, in this country, be extinct. You will remember that I have already told you many animals, and reptiles, and birds, lived in England in former years, which are never met with now-a-days ; and amongst these the



GREAT BUSTARD

is doomed to be numbered ; civilization will soon sweep away the broad desolate downs which he loves to inhabit—houses and railways will over-run his old solitary haunts ; and in the course of time his skeleton will be sought for as a curiosity. Nor will you think that there is any thing marvellous in this, when I tell you that in ancient times, large elephants ranged over England, to-

gether with wild and savage hyænas, and huge bears, nearly as large as horses, with sharp-clawed tigers, which exceeded in size any that are now found alive in foreign countries ; and with these were found the rhinoceros, and hippopotamus ; and that scarcely a year elapses, without bringing to light numbers of their teeth and bones, which have for ages been buried in the earth, and in deep dark caverns, many of which were discovered by accident, or brought to light by mining operations, and railway excavations. But some day I intend writing a book, which will make you acquainted with all these wonders, and which will prove to you, that England was inhabited by these huge and extinct monsters, ages before man ever set foot upon it. That all the romantic stories you ever read in your life, cannot approach the truths which I will make you acquainted with, when I come to describe the vast creatures that once roved and fed on this island, wallowed in the muddy marshes, and swam the vast rivers ; some of them nearly an hundred feet in length, while the mammoth elephants, had tusks above twelve feet long, and which, if straight, would have extended across a moderate sized apartment ; even a single tooth has been discovered which measures fifteen inches in length. But lest the mention of so many wonderful things should cause you to think too seriously, I must tell you another of my country stories, and introduce to your notice, a character whom I well knew, and who will long be remembered in the village where he resided, by the name of Billy-go-easy.

Amongst the oddities which were found in the village of Blyton, was a strange, queer, good-natured wag ; a dear lover of quiet mischief, known to everybody for miles around the neighbourhood, and who never went by any other name than that of Billy-go-Easy, for nothing seemed a trouble to him ; and whatever might happen he took it quite easy ; and he was often wont to say, “ Grumbling and growling does no good ; I never got any thing by it in my life, and I never yet found the

man who was a groat a year richer for grumbling ;” and Billy-go-Easy seemed to get through the world with his come-day go-day sort of carelessness, as well as the best of his neighbours. Billy went, one day, to the public house, which he was too much in the habit of frequenting, called for a pint of ale, drank it up, and then, with a cool indifference, said, “I’ve got no money, but I’ll pay you when my ship comes in.” Now, when it is known that such a man as Billy had no ship, and that he might just as well have said, “when I come into a large fortune,” for the chance there was of either promise being fulfilled ; and, further, as this ship was always Billy’s shift when he had no money, and the landlord had a goodly row of white chalk-marks behind his door, which stood for pints and half-pints, he came from behind the bar, and gave Billy, in addition to a few hard words, a good hearty kick, which drove him behind the door, making sure within his own mind that this would be the safest way of getting rid of Billy’s custom at once. But not a bit of it ; Billy-go-Easy walked up to the bar again, as if nothing at all was amiss, and, taking up the empty pint pot, presented it to the landlord, saying, “I’ll thank you to fill it again at the same price ; it shall be a kick for a pint as often as you like to fill it.” Another time, when the club-feast was held at the village public-house, just at the finish of dinner, cheese was brought in, cut into beautiful square pieces, all on one plate ; and, as Billy sat nearest the door, the plate of cheese, which was intended for the company, was given to him by the waiter, who expected that, when Billy had helped himself to a bit, as was the custom, he would have passed it from one to another ; but no such thought had ever entered the head of Billy-go-Easy. He looked hard at the waiter, and simply said, “Thank thee, John ; thou’st helped me very bountifully, but I’ll try.” He then quite leisurely finished the whole plate of cheese, thinking, no

doubt, that it was very kind and considerate of John to have cut it up into such nice mouthfuls for him. Another time, while Billy was transacting a little business at the market-town, he had a severe attack of the toothache, so bad, indeed, that he was compelled to apply to a dentist, and to have the tooth drawn. The dentist was very clever at his profession, and, as Billy said afterwards, "It was only open your mouth, and out it went." "What 's to pay?" said Billy. "A shilling," was the answer. "Nay, nay," said Billy, whom it took a great deal to move; "I can't encourage imposition. Let a man do his work for his money, and I'll never begrudge paying him a fair price. A shilling! why you have n't been half a minute; and there 's that barber, at yonder village of ours, when he draws me a tooth, he takes his pincers and sometimes pulls me round his shop for a quarter of an hour together, and then he only charges me sixpence." Billy's reasons, for opposing so high a charge, so much amused the dentist, that he let him off without paying anything.

There was one landlord at Blyton, of so surly and savage a nature, that he was called "The Bear;" and, as his ale-house sign was also that of a bear, it was a common saying amongst the villagers, that there was a bear within and a bear without. If any one asked for credit, the landlord would point to a great board over the mantel-piece, and say, Read that. They did read it, and thus run the couplet,—

"There is no credit here;
The Bear trusts no one beer."

Billy, however, bet a wager, of a crown, that he would go to the bear, have his dinner, whatever he pleased to drink, not pay a single farthing, and yet escape without an angry word. Had he proposed that he would go into the den of a tiger, and come out again without a scratch, they would have thought it just as probable, as that he should quit the bear on such con-

ditions as he had named, without two or three good hearty hugs. For if either an angry word or a blow were exchanged, Billy lost his bet. The next day Billy went in with all the ease in the world : the bear was behind the bar ; he bade him good morning, and asked him for change for half a sovereign. " Is it good ? " growled the bear. " Weigh it," said Billy ; he did, it was a bumper, and he handed Billy over the ten shillings change. " Now," said Billy, " I've come to enjoy myself for half a day's holiday, and I should like a bit of something nice for my dinner ; what can you get me ? " " We've got a couple of fowls and a piece of ham boiling," said the landlord of the bear, " you can't have any thing nicer than that." " Just the thing," answered Billy. Billy took it very easy, and made a very hearty dinner ; drinking also two pints of choice old ale, which, as a great favour, he was supplied with from a favourite barrel in the cellar ; and so social did the bear become, that they sat down, and had a pipe together after dinner. The landlord's niece had gone somewhere on an errand ; the ostler was busy in the stables, so that there was no one left in the bar but the bear, and Billy. Billy kept looking up at the clock ; for he had only until three allowed him, and he already saw two or three, who were in the secret, waiting outside ; no doubt, expecting to see him come every moment with a kick across the road. " I'll just trouble you for another pint of this beautiful ale," said Billy, " then I must be off." The bear growled " Very well," laid down his pipe, took up the pint pot, and went into the cellar. Billy, who had his eyes about him, and had long been planning an escape, noticed that the large key was in the cellar-door outside, so, rising very gently, he put to the cellar-door, gave the key a turn, locked in the landlord, and shouting, loud enough to be heard by his comrades outside, " Good day, Mr. Bear," he walked out. They were astonished ; to call him " bear," too, and then escape ; such a thing had never

been heard of. They could not believe it; he must be out. "Out or in," said Billy, "I've won; if you doubt my word go in and judge for yourselves. I've had a good dinner, plenty to drink, civility, never paid a farthing; neither have I promised. You'll excuse my going in with you." And Billy went off a good deal quicker, than his usual easy pace.

They did go in; but of all the uproars they had ever heard in their lives, there never was one that approached near to what was made by the landlord, whilst locked up in his own cellar,—“he would murder Billy, flay him alive, hang him, transport him, have him tried for robbery,” and I cannot tell you what beside. They soon saw how Billy had won the wager; and when they had liberated the bear, and told him the whole affair, his growl approached nearer to a laugh, than it had ever been known to do since he first took possession of his den. “Never mind,” said he, “I shall be even with Billy some of these days, although he has won his wager; and he'll not get off so easy next time.”

It was one bitter winter's morning, when Billy-go-easy was seen walking up the village in a very different way to what he generally did, he left a track behind him like a water-cart, and hung his head down in a very sheepish manner. What was the matter? Poor Billy! he had that very morning fallen into the clutches of the bear, and, in his loving embrace, had been soused head over ears in the horse-trough, until he could scarcely breathe; and, when liberated, he just gave himself a shake or two, and without speaking a word, slunk off like a half-drowned rat, and was never afterwards heard to boast how he won his wager.

Beautiful are the starry heavens during a frosty winter-night, when all the golden lamps are lighted and hung about the blue and bending archway of the sky, leaving us lost in wonder while we gaze, and endeavour to fancy, since the dark under-floor of heaven is so beautiful, what that land of

unending love and eternal life must be! Humble and awed, we gaze upwards, and contemplate those mysterious worlds—the glittering orbs which revolve round and round for evermore—the vast planets, that may be uninhabited and silent, or teeming with another race of human beings, compared to whom we are but as children in intellect. We look upon the moon, and marvel what unknown world lies mapped out upon that bright and rounded globe! We think of the mountains which astronomers have discovered, the distinct volcanoes they have noted down, and the deep valleys in which the shadows of those mighty mountains ever sleep, and we are lost in amazement whilst we gaze, and feel that we are mere atoms in this vast and incomprehensible creation—that, while the earth, the air, and the sky are peopled with living things, and on every hand there is the busy stir of life, those great, far-off, and unknown worlds may, perchance, be inhabited! Nor can we conceive that, if this earth were swept away, with all that it contains, it would leave a greater blank in the roll of unnumbered worlds than a single star which is hidden for a moment, does in the sky, where the whole face of heaven is thickly studded every way. Other worlds would still exist, and other suns shine, while over all, perhaps, bent a heaven more blue, and starry, and beautiful, than ever stretched its azure and golden curtains above this earth which we inhabit. All that science has discovered, and that wise men have made known, is, that these great realms exist, and are surrounded with awful mystery, and are so remote that we can never know what they contain, nor catch a sound from the distant silence in which they are buried. They may contain other elements which we know not of—living essences which have never entered our comprehension. Great nurseries of immortality, where those who have passed away, breathe the tempered air of eternal life! Who, after contemplating such objects of sublime grandeur, cannot, at a glance, see that such

magnificent workmanship could only be produced by the hand of God? What are the loftiest temples that man ever erected, compared to these wonders? Beside them, in comparison, the mole-hill stands prominent at the foot of the mountain. We know nothing of the secret things which are buried within the centre of the earth that we inhabit: of the dark, fathomless, and watery caverns that evermore go down, and the ever-burning and hollow deserts of fire, which have burnt for unnumbered ages in the heart of this globe: earthquakes that undermine and swallow up cities in a moment: comets, that in their fiery course may strike our world in an instant, and hurl it nearer the consuming fires of the sun, or into a region of cold and darkness, where nothing ever yet could live. The axis upon which it revolves, the unknown space which reigns around it, the worlds which are thousands of times larger than ours, and yet to the eye appear mere specks; the rapidity with which light travels, and the distance it has to come ere it reaches the earth; that incomprehensible and endless extent of space, which the human mind can only conceive as unnumbered millions of leagues of eternal darkness,—all stagger our poor understanding, and make us feel our insignificance beside the Almighty Creator of these stupendous works. And from the hour that the ancient Chaldeans were first struck by the letters of light that are written upon the face of heaven, to when our own clear-sighted Newton shaped them into words, and taught us to read the language of the heavens, and mapped out the course of the stars, until they rose as clear before the eyes, as the roads through a province; even from that period, and through all these discoveries, we but gaze as through “a glass darkened.” What we can behold and comprehend throws but a deeper mystery around what is beyond, and makes us feel that the grand scale on which God completed His works is above all human comprehension,

and we exclaim to ourselves, in the sublime language of Job, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors when it brake forth as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?”* What boy can read such a sublime description as this without feeling how mighty, and wonderful, and mysterious, and grand, and awful, must be the Divinity that did these things; compared to which the Pyramids of Egypt are but as little hillocks raised by the labouring ants. Yet, in this great scale of Creation, man is exalted above all other things; he alone is gifted with a power of comprehending these wonders, of perceiving that they are the workmanship of his Creator, and that the same hand which fashioned him made them. The birds and insects delight in, and enjoy the clear air of heaven; myriads of fishes plough their way through the bosom of the great deep; the “cattle upon a thousand hills” low, and feed, and sleep, and are happy in these enjoyments; man only sees the shadowy outline of the Almighty finger which formed them. I dare not number these planets, nor tell you the vast distances that these worlds are placed asunder, nor measure the untrodden boundaries of unknown space; for almost every year brings some new proof that man is yet in ignorance, and one discovery but drives another back to its infancy. For while even the formation and habits of many animals, their uses in creation, and adaptation of organs, which we can dis-

* The Book of Job, chap. 38.

cover no use for—while these things, which pass daily under our eyes, are beyond our understanding, how shall we be able to say with certainty that these are the limits, and this is the space; here light begins, and there darkness never ends; this globe is inhabited, and that desolate; there no living thing ever breathed, and here all is filled with life. Days spent in reading, and nights wasted in silent thought, but convince me how little the collected wisdom of ages has gathered together, and how ignorant we are of the true construction of the world which we inhabit. We need no other proof to show the immeasurable distinction between God and man. Man may form governments, and make laws, and conquer kingdoms, and erect cities; and yet, in these things, he does no more than is accomplished even by insects, on a smaller scale, who are not gifted with the power of reason, like him: he has higher powers than these to boast of, for he alone is endowed with the perception, that can dimly see into the marvellous workmanship of his Creator; that is, allowed to comprehend the existence of God. What are the thoughts and feelings of a noble-hearted English boy, when he hears of the poor ignorant heathens kneeling down and worshipping their hideous wooden idols! what, but a proud feeling of his own condition, and pity for the benighted minds which still grope their way through such a cloud of error! Yet, but a few brief centuries ago, the very England which we inhabit lay prostrate at the feet of such idols—the Druid erected his wicker god, and the ancient Britons bowed before it; and even only as far back as the time of Alfred, Christianity was still in its infancy. What are we, then, but mere pilgrims setting out in the search of truth, moving slowly on, as it were, in the first morning of our journey, and who cannot yet tell what wonders may be discovered by those who will follow in the difficult paths which we have paved, and reach those hidden gates, before the close of the day. From

the dew-drop that glitters upon the flower, to the star whose light falls unheeded upon it by us, there may be some connecting link which we cannot yet perceive; that tiny globe may, with unnumbered millions, temper the very air which we breathe, and that star, light up some other land which reflects the rays from our own. Yet, wonderful and incomprehensible as all these are, only to meditate upon them chastens the mind; and as our understanding draws nearer to the contemplation of the works of the Creator, so do we, unconsciously, prepare ourselves for that change which will ere long bring us into His presence. And who can tell but that the unknown joys of heaven may consist in clearly comprehending all these wonders: in the delight of gathering immortal knowledge! But in spite of all this grave writing, I would not have you to suppose that I was a bit better than any of my companions. No! I have caught rabbits in traps, and set snares, and gone out with my schoolfellows a



BIRD CATCHING IN THE SNOW.

A sieve, a string, a stick, and a lump of bread, or a pocketful of corn, were all the arms and ammunition we required : for our object was to capture them alive, carry them home, and feed them until the Spring came, when they were again restored to liberty. A little shed, the corner of a wall, or the stem of a large old tree, were the sheltering places we selected ; when having reared up the sieve, so as to rest on the edge of the stick, and scattered a few crumbs, or a little corn, upon the snow, we retreated to reconnoitre from our hiding-place, keeping hold of the end of the string, and peeping out, you may be sure, about every minute or so ; when, waiting a favourable moment, until sometimes as many as half-a-dozen birds were seen pecking about the sieve, we gave the string a pull, and down it came. Oh ! what a running there was then ; and very often in our eagerness to seize the birds which were under the trap, one or two would escape. Although it was wrong to deprive the birds of their freedom, still, somehow, we thought that we were showing them the greatest of kindness, by taking them home, and feeding them well, when so little food was to be found in the fields. Bless you ! we never once thought how we should like being served so ourselves.

And during these out-of-door excursions, we sometimes heard sounding over the bleak and cheerless landscape, the voice of the little lamb, as it bleated faintly ; and glancing over the hedge, we saw the poor little thing shivering, and looking upon the ground, while it stood beside its dam, as if after examining the snow and the frost, which still hung white upon the grass, it seemed to say to itself, “I wonder whatever they think I can be made of to leave me here exposed to the cold, while my poor old mother can scarcely pick up enough to keep herself alive ; and I ’m sure I feel so weak, that if I were to run about to warm myself, I think I should drop ; and if the flowers, and sunshine, and sweet green grass, that they told me about this morning, does n’t come soon, they ’ll have to carry

me in doors, and rear me up beside the warm fire, and feed me with milk, for I can never stand such weather as this, and that's the truth of it. A great long-eared hare ran bang up against me this morning, and nearly carried me off my poor long legs; and I can scarcely sleep at nights, the little shed they put me into is so cold; and I often wish I were any where but where I am." And the poor thing takes a turn or two, as if to warm its feet, then comes back again, and creeps close to the side of the ewe for shelter. And it often happens, during this cold season, that when a lamb dies, the skin is taken off, and placed upon the back of another lamb, whose mother has got a sufficiency of milk; and the poor ewe, that has lost her lamb, will take to it, and bleat over it, and caress it, as if it were her own, and seem, if possible, to bestow more attention upon it than she ever did upon the one she has lost. Many a cold night do the shepherds pass in the fields, and upon the hill-sides, during the lambing season, attending to their flocks; and were it not for the care and attention with which they look after their lambs, scores of them, during a season, would be lost, so much do the sheep and lambs suffer through the cold, at this time of the year. I have read an anecdote of the affection of a sheep for its lamb, which says, that for two or three weeks it never moved, beyond a few yards, from the dead lamb; and even when only the wool and bones remained, night and morning it visited them, until, at last, every trace was obliterated by the weather.

Although the birds, which I here introduce to your notice, do not visit England until Spring, and leave our island late in Autumn, still their habits are so interesting, that I shall offer no apology for thus making you acquainted with them, a little time after their departure. The Ruff is about a foot in length; and you will not fail to notice the beautiful feathery tippet which adorns his neck, and which, when he is in full plumage, is barred with black, and white, and brown, varying so

much that it is a rare thing to find two birds marked alike. But, of all the fighters, the



RUFF

is the most quarrelsome. He possesses as much courage as the most thorough-bred game-cock; and also fights after the same manner, with his head downward, while the ruff, or tippet around the neck, bristles up, until every feather is distended; and you never saw a fiercer-looking little gentleman than he is when his blood is once up. You have often heard the saying of "cock of the walk," applied to some overbearing boy, who endeavours to obtain the mastery over all others. The same phrase may be used in describing the ruff, only he exercises his ambition and valour to become "cock of the hill;" for they invariably select the highest spot of ground for their battle-field: and so much is the earth trampled, and torn up by their successive combats, that it serves as a guide to the fowler where to plant his nets; and he has only to place a stuffed bird or two upon the spot, where numbers, at times,

rush up together to the battle, when the net is thrown over them, and they are caught. The



REEVE,

or female bird, is devoid of this beautiful frill, which decorates the neck of the male, and is also much smaller than the ruff. In former years these birds were very plentiful in the fens and marshes of Lincolnshire; but, like the bustard, they are now becoming more rare; and probably, in a few more years, will retire altogether from this island, and seek other breeding-grounds, which civilization and cultivation have not yet reached. When fattened for the table, they have frequently fetched as much as two guineas a dozen. The reeve builds her nest in wet, swampy places, amid the long, coarse grass, and lays four eggs, which in colour bear a close resemblance to those of the snipe and redshank, and are only distinguished through being a little larger, and marked with a ground-colour of greenish hue. The ruff casts its long neck-feathers before the end of Summer, and undergoes a great change in the hues of its plumage. As this species will pro-

bably, in a few more years, be swept away, I have enriched my pages with the above beautiful engravings, both of which were drawn from the life.

How beautiful do the naked ramifications of the trees show through the clear, unclouded moonlight of Winter! Even if you only look upon the shadows on the ground, every bough and twig are so clearly limned, that you might easily copy them on paper; but resting upon the clear, blue background of a frosty and moonlight sky, the strongly marked lines stand out beautifully: you behold a grace and a harmony which you had never before seen, and are struck with the naked perfection you now witness; and you feel delighted that you have discovered something new. All kinds of fanciful forms, that were ever embroidered, or netted, are there: rich open-work, shaped into flowers, and stars, and diamonded spaces, that go opening and running into splendid scroll-work, formed by boughs which spread out, and sprays that droop down, and slender twigs that fall between, and cross, at every imaginable angle, in deep and slender lines, as if the inner work were trimmed round with a dark border. Magnificent, too, is the moonlight upon a river, when the silver rays trail from ripple to ripple, making a bright pathway far along, which ever, as you move, is still before you; growing more lovely under every cloud that passes over, while the water reflects each star, deep down, in the blue chambers that are mirrored below. On the banks, too, where the sharp-edged and broad-bladed flags droop, and the tall, tufted reeds wave with their parted plumes, a hundred varying shadows are ever moving, and crossing each other, as they fall upon the transparent ripples. Nor would an observant boy, stand to shelter under a gateway, on a rainy night, without finding a few moments of amusement, in the shadows of the passengers which pass over the pavement, where the glare from the gas-lamp falls; each following the other, and moving on with their feet uppermost. Some might laugh to see a sensible-looking

man blowing bubbles, and watching them with all the eagerness of a child, as they arose and burst: but if by such means that man was seeking to unravel the theory of light and colours, with what different feelings should we follow each bubble into the air, and retire with the knowledge, that we had laughed at what we could not understand. There is scarcely an object that exists, which, if looked upon aright, is not capable of furnishing us with some idea that may lead to another; and so on, in endless succession, until we at last are enabled to unravel some long-hidden truth. Not that all could gather, from a falling apple, the laws of gravity, which Newton discovered; or, like Columbus, have the faith to sail along, confident that, whether he reached it or not, beyond that trackless ocean an unknown country did exist. A boy who sees his shadow in the morning, at evening reversed, will soon behold new wonders connected with light, and discover touches in the beautiful pictures painted by Nature, which another boy, who never observed such trifles as these, is unable to see. The ragged flakes of frost upon the boughs; the scarlet berries that peep through the pearly whiteness; the dark green leaves that the rime has veined with silver; the starry shape which the ice has assumed, as it froze up, into diverging rays, the little puddle in the highway; the drooping blades of grass, frosted over with minute pearls,—are all objects of beauty, though on a minor scale; and I pity the boy who can see nothing to admire in such trifles. Even the absence of so many things, which have been familiar to the eye and ear throughout Summer and Autumn, cannot fail to strike the mind. The leaves, which hung so green, and shadowy above our heads, and which, after they had fallen, went hurrying and rustling over the ground, where are they? Rotted and mingled with the soil: for the great gardener, Nature, has made out of their very decay a rich bed for the flowers of Spring and Summer to blow upon. The gaudy insects that flew from field to field, and flower to flower,

are now nowhere to be seen ; the deep-dyed blue and beautiful dragon-fly no longer beholds its winged shadow in the stream ; only a few gnats are seen dancing when the weather is warm, and they, somehow or another, do not appear to have that summer sprightliness in their motions, but look as if they had only just come out for a few moments to straighten their legs and wings. And yet what a number of things we meet with worthy of observation !—but notice that skeleton leaf ; there is only the fibre left, yet what lace or net-work was ever woven half so beautiful as what still remains of this green Summer roof ? How many times should we have passed by this little bed of cup-moss without observing it, had this hillock been covered with wild flowers ; yet look upon it now, and examine it closely : what beautiful shapes has it grown into—urns, and cups, and vases, green, and silvered over, as if with minute frost-work, and each rising as gracefully from its rounded stem, as if it had received its careful finish from the hand of a great artist. What a contrast to the giant oak by which it is overshadowed ; yet both are the production of the same mighty hand : the elephant that shakes the forest beneath his heavy tread, and the tiny insect that bends not down the blade of grass it is so long in ascending, both proclaim, “ that the hand which made them is Divine.” The same minute frost-work which silvered over the lowly ways, on a grander scale formed the terrific avalanche which thundered into the valley, and went moving on, in after years, until, at last, the glacier melted away, and left the mighty mass of rock, which it had encrusted over, and borne with it from the dizzy height, for us to marvel at, and wonder how it first came there. Mountain ridges were often formed by the same power ; and many a mighty glacier wore its way through the slow crumbling masses of earth. The coal we burn is but the remains of forest trees, which, ages ago, were overturned, and buried beneath the soil ; and, in the heated mass, you will often see how the engrained fibres still retain

their tenacious hold: for heat and cold, fire and water, have ever been the chief agents in preparing this earth for the abode of man. It seems as if the Creator but commanded them to make preparation for the coming of man, and they obeyed His bidding; as if His all-seeing eye had alighted upon an uninhabited world, and He had said to the elements, "Make it ready, and I will people it."

But before I conclude my volume, I shall enrich it with a description of Winter, written three hundred years ago, by an old Scotch bishop, named Gawin Douglas; and I am sure you will be pleased with the number of pictures he has painted in words, many of them so distinctly drawn, that they seem to rise up before you, whilst reading,—such as the "Cattle looking hoary" in the ragged frost; the "Red reed" wavering beside the dyke in the cold wind; the "Grey, dusky soil," grassless and flowerless; the "Poor labourer" dragging his wet and weary limbs through the mud; and "mire of the fen." These, and many others, will strike you by their truth and beauty, and show you that rhyme and metre are not necessary for beautiful poetical description, but that splendid poetry can be written without the aid of versification. Nor would you understand the passage in its rough, original form; so I here give it you as modernised by Warton, whose name will be familiar to many of you as a writer of very beautiful poetry.

"The fern withered on the miry fallows, the brown moors assumed a barren mossy hue; banks, sides of hills, and bottoms, grew white and bare; the cattle looked hoary from the dank weather, the wind made the red reed waver on the dyke. From the crags and the foreheads of the yellow rocks hung great icicles, in length, like a spear. The soil was dusky and grey, bereft of flowers, herbs, and grass: in every holt and forest the woods were stripped of their array. Boreas* blew his bugle-horn so loud, that the solitary deer withdrew to the

* Boreas, a name given by the Heathen poets to the north wind.

dales; the small birds flocked to the thick briars, shunning the tempestuous blast, and changing their loud notes to chirping; the cataracts roared; and every linden-tree whistled and bowed to the sounding of the wind. The poor labourers, wet and weary, draggled in the fen; the sheep and shepherds lurked under the hanging banks, or wild broom. Warm from the chimney-side, and refreshed with generous cheer, I stole to my bed, and lay down to sleep, when I saw the moon shed through the window her twinkling glances and wintry light; I heard the horned bird, the night-owl, shrieking horribly with crooked bill from her cavern; I heard the wild geese, with screaming cries, fly over the city through the silent night. I was soon lulled to sleep, till the cock, clapping his wings, crowed thrice, and the day peeped. I waked and saw the moon disappear, and heard the jackdaws cackle on the roof of the house. The cranes, prognosticating tempests, in a firm phalanx, pierced the air, with voices sounding like a trumpet. The kite, perched on an old tree fast by my chamber, cried lamentably, a sign of the dawning day. I rose, and half opening my window, perceived the morning, livid, wan, and hoary; the air overwhelmed with vapour and cloud; the ground, stiff, grey, and rough; the branches rustling, the sides of the hills looking black and hard with the driving blasts; the dew-drops congealed on the stubble and rind of trees; the sharp hailstones deadly cold, and hopping on the thatch."

Wonderful is that power which, at a touch, deadens all Nature!—checks the sap, and stops the growth, and leaves naked the whole landscape: and yet this change comes so gradually, that we scarcely perceive it! And as it comes, so it goes! We observe a flower here, and a bud there—a few weeks more, and, all around, there are signs of Spring. Even the young leaves of the primrose are visible; and we can trace out the spot where the violets will come; and we begin to see the green shoots which announce the blowing of the blue bells;

and sometimes, even in a yet naked hedge, we discover a new nest. For Nature has so ordained it, that even in the midst of Winter we are enabled to trace some sign of the approach of Spring; for there are many little changes going on in the earth which inform the observant eye that, although the ground is covered with snow, there is still a mighty and unseen hand at work, which has already marked out upon the naked sprays, where the future leaves shall appear, and has flung upon the earth some green trace, to point out where the earliest flowers of Spring shall ere long blossom. And even upon the cold edge of Winter the pale snowdrop appears, like a solitary traveller that has set out, alone, from the land of flowers, and lost his way, and knows not whether to retrace his steps, or pitch his tent amid the piercing frost and sharp sleet, and there await the arrival of his brother travellers, whom he has left deep underground, sound asleep; as if they had put off their journey to the earth for a little while, ere they set out from their hidden home laden with rich treasures of flowers and blossoms. Next comes the timid crocus, as if half afraid to thrust its golden head out of its green sheath, rising up, as if the buried sunshine of summer had emerged from the earth, and was looking out to see why the sunshine of heaven delayed so long. And even before the snow has melted from the face of the dull green meadows, there are spots, where we might fancy that a few flakes still lingered upon the grass, were we not to approach nearer, and satisfy ourselves that here and there a daisy had risen up from its wintry sleep. And sometimes a solitary lark, as if wearied of the silence which has so long reigned around, will start up from the ground on a mild winter morning, and, trying a few notes, soar upward a little way, when, as if finding that singing is but cold work in the frosty air, it will sink down again amid the silence of its hiding-place. The thristle and blackbird will also occasionally strike up a note or two, like a musician who tries his instrument, and instead of playing, as

WINTER.

you anticipated, puts it back again into its case, so will they, after a brief rehearsal, hop away again, as if they thought it a waste of music to try their voices, until called forth to sing in the grand opening chorus of Spring.

And here I end my book, with a little design, copied from Bewick, a perfect Winter-picture; for one glance at the man sheltering behind the haystack, tells you how cold it is, and the dull, heavy, leaden-coloured sky shows that the storm will be a long time passing over, and that both the dog and its master will have to plod their weary way through the snow, for a considerable distance, before they reach home; for there is no human habitation at hand, nor no one to help the poor man up with the bundle of sticks he has gathered.



THE END.





